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# JESUS THE PREACHER

by  
FRANCIS J. HANDY



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# JESUS THE PREACHER

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DEDICATED TO FOUR RELENTLESS CRITICS OF MY PREACH-  
ING—MY WIFE, MOIRA, AND MY THREE CHILDREN, FRANK,  
ADRIENNE, AND ELIZABETH—IN THE HOPE THAT I  
MAY ONE DAY PREACH TO THEIR ENTIRE SATISFACTION



## Preface

THE AIM OF THIS BOOK IS PRACTICAL RATHER THAN ACADEMIC. It is based on the Synoptic Gospels with references to the Fourth Gospel. Where possible I have used those gospel documents which possess a high historical authority, but at certain points I have been forced to use gospel evidence not so strongly attested. My fundamental assumptions are that an adequate knowledge of Jesus the preacher and the content of his preaching may be obtained from the Gospels by the critical methods I have employed, and that the conclusions thus ascertained are fundamental to a right proclamation and interpretation of the Christian message as a whole. While appreciating the efforts of those who seek to set forth the unity of the New Testament, I maintain that a true understanding of the content of our Lord's own preaching, apart from its interpretation by his first followers, is essential for the understanding of the whole of the New Testament.

As one who loves to preach and who believes in the necessity of the Christian pulpit, I have studied Jesus the preacher in order to discover, if possible, something of the secret of his power in preaching. If some discouraged preacher is fired anew with the possibilities of his high calling, if some young preacher is encouraged to model himself and his message on what he finds in Jesus, or if some student is challenged to become a preacher by what I have written, this book will have fulfilled some of my hopes for it.

FRANCIS J. HANDY



# Contents

## CHAPTER ONE

JESUS CAME PREACHING . . . . .	11
--------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER TWO

A PREACHER PREPARED . . . . .	29
-------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER THREE

HIS USE OF LANGUAGE . . . . .	54
-------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER FOUR

PREACHING IN PICTURES . . . . .	66
---------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER FIVE

TWO DISTINCT TYPES . . . . .	77
------------------------------	----

## CHAPTER SIX

TOPICAL PREACHING . . . . .	87
-----------------------------	----

## CHAPTER SEVEN

OPEN-AIR EVANGELISM . . . . .	112
-------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER EIGHT

HIS RULING IDEAS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TODAY .	118
--	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	138
------------------------	-----

INDEX . . . . .	141
-----------------	-----

# 1

## Jesus Came Preaching

A CAREFUL STUDY OF OUR LORD'S UTTERANCES REVEALS THAT HE both proclaimed and expounded the word of God or good news of the kingdom according to the particular situation confronting him and his understanding of its need. Sometimes the element of preaching dominates, sometimes the element of teaching, and often the two are blended. He stands near to the modern preacher in his conception of preaching.

The clear-cut distinction between "preaching" and "teaching" <sup>1</sup> which is made by some scholars in their eagerness to stress the dogmatic unity of the New Testament finds no support in the Synoptic Gospels. The synoptists make no dogmatic distinction between these words, but use the terms interchangeably. What one writer describes as "preaching" another will call "teaching" (Mark 1:39; Matt. 13:54). Mark, it is thought, makes some attempt to distinguish between preaching as the open-air proclamation and teaching as an exposition of scripture. He says that Jesus came into Galilee "preaching" (1:14), but that he went into the synagogue "and taught" (1:21). Yet even according to Mark, Jesus did not confine his teaching to the synagogues nor his preaching to the open air.

Whatever dogmatic emphasis the rest of the New Testament writers may place on the words, this emphasis does not rest on them as they are used by the synoptists. The only distinction we may make from their use of these words is the

<sup>1</sup> κήρυγμα and διδασχί.



general one that when Jesus came into Galilee announcing or proclaiming as a herald "the gospel of the kingdom of God," he was preaching. When, however, he went beyond that to inquire, "Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?" and then proceeded to illustrate its qualities and to discuss its characteristics, he was teaching.

### A PROPHET-TEACHER

Our Lord combined the functions of both the prophet and the scribe. He began his ministry by taking up the message of John the Baptist about the kingdom. He too proclaimed its near advent, but with a difference: with John it was a warning; with Jesus it was "glad tidings." Everything about John was in keeping with his ascetic character, the seriousness of his mission, and especially his likeness to Elijah, whom he imitated, consciously or unconsciously, in appearance and manner. Jesus, however, made no attempt to re-enact the part of any of the prophets of Israel; neither in language nor dress did he seek to imitate the great men of the past, but his conception of his vocation was superlatively prophetic.

Jesus' call to his work was the true prophetic call. The vision he saw and the voice of divine approval he heard at his baptism were like the visions and voices the prophets had seen and heard. The mission of Moses was inaugurated by the visionary experience of the burning bush (Exod. 3:2), and Isaiah was called through his vision in the temple (6:1-9). It was in his inaugural vision that the ancient prophet found the source of his authority. In that experience he recognized himself as the appointed messenger of Yahweh to Israel. His authority, however, was a delegated authority. Both his message and mission were prescribed, and only within the limits of his special commission was he authorized to speak in the

name of Yahweh. The source of our Lord's authority is to be found in his experience at Jordan, which initiated his public ministry. It is clear that the consciousness he had of his sonship was a consciousness of purpose, a consciousness of being sent to serve the purposes of God for men. At his baptism his filial relation to the Father was brought to focus, and his many previous ponderings concerning himself were confirmed. In that intense spiritual experience he was assured of his unique sonship and of his fitness to fulfill the ends of God on earth.

In taking John the Baptist as illustration when his "authority" was challenged (Mark 11:29-33=Matt. 21:24-27=Luke 20:3-8), Jesus hinted that it was prophetic authority he would claim for himself. When the prophet spoke with authority, it was as a messenger of Yahweh. The message he had to deliver was properly introduced by the formula "Thus saith the Lord." The formula Jesus used, "I say unto you," or frequently the emphatic "Verily I say unto you," might have sometimes marked his consciousness of going beyond the prophetic claim, but generally the difference between the two formulas seems to be one of form rather than of content. His consciousness of sonship expressed in "Thou art my Son" is suggestive of something more than a messenger or a servant. Thus, while the prophetic call was relative to a given historical situation, his filial relation was independent of place, time, or circumstance. We may conclude that in form his authority was such as a prophet claimed in speaking for Yahweh; in substance it was such as came from his filial consciousness. Jesus' realization of God's fatherhood was a personal religious experience of unparalleled depth and intensity which assured him of the constant possession of the divine Spirit.

It is more than probable that Luke was incorrect in placing the rejection at Nazareth at the beginning of our Lord's ministry (4:16-32), but we need not suppose that Luke was led by



any unworthy dogmatic motive to invest the event with a significance it did not actually possess. And although the account of Jesus' reading from the book of Isaiah (61:1-3) and his proclaiming himself as the fulfillment of the prophecy (Luke 4:17-21) is peculiar to Luke, we have no reason to doubt its authenticity. We may assume that the record tells us not only how Luke thought about the mission of Jesus but even what may have been in the mind of Jesus himself regarding his call to preach. There can be no doubt that the words he read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach," fitted into the framework of his dominating conception; and further, the references to Elijah and Elisha in his utterance that followed suggest that it was the role of the prophet par excellence which Jesus appreciated in the passage.

References to himself as a prophet are well authenticated: "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house" (Mark 6:4=Matt. 13:57=John 4:44). That he often gave the impression of being a prophet is evidenced by the testimonies from men of differing types and outlooks (Mark 6:15; Luke 24:19). And when the shadows of approaching doom were about him, Jesus placed himself in line with the prophets, foretelling that, similarly to them, he could not perish out of Jerusalem (Luke 13:33).

If the distinctive traits of the Old Testament prophets were prediction of future events, ecstatic vision, and symbolism, then it may be said that Jesus was a prophet. He undoubtedly possessed these distinctive characteristics, which the Hebrew mind regarded as the distinguishing marks of prophetic activity. He predicted his betrayal, Peter's denial, and his own death. It may be argued that he foresaw the siege and sack of Jerusalem (Luke 13:34; Matt. 23:37), that he foretold the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:2=Matt.



24:2=Luke 21:6). In his visionary experience at his baptism and in the wilderness temptations he realized his unique status and his mission. To these may be added his transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8=Matt. 17:1-8=Luke 9:28-36) and his vision of Satan fallen from heaven (Luke 10:18, L or Q). It is also probable that Jesus' discourse on the bread of life (John 6:26-59), though peculiar to the Fourth Gospel, is in its present form the elaboration by the writer of some symbolic saying of Jesus. His choice of twelve disciples to sit upon the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel was surely a symbolic act (Luke 22:30, L=Matt. 19:28, M). And the manner of his entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11=Matt. 21:1-11=Luke 19:28-38) was undoubtedly meant to have a messianic significance.

While it is not improbable that many of the details of Jesus' prophecies were filled in at a later date, and while it can be conceded that many of his prophecies concerning himself, Jerusalem, and the temple may have been influenced by the primitive apologetic, the cumulative result of the evidence is that our Lord's prophetic function was not merely apparent but real. He impressed his contemporaries as a prophet not only because he was a teacher and preacher who took an independent line but because his personality and methods were essentially prophetic.

The fact that the title "teacher" was used by our Lord's disciples as the usual form of address is obscured in our commonly used version because the word which strictly means "teacher" <sup>2</sup> is generally rendered "master." In the main the revisions and modern translations correct this. Almost certainly this word represents the Hebrew or Aramaic form "rabbi," which occurs several times in the King James Version. It was a title of honor and respect addressed to religious

<sup>2</sup> διδάσκαλος.

teachers, and in this sense it is frequently applied to Jesus. The title appears to have come into use in the time of Hillel, about 100 B.C. On two occasions the longer and more courteous form "rabboni" is employed, once by the blind man (Mark 10:51) and once by Mary Magdalene (John 20:16).

Not infrequently during his ministry Jesus was identified as a "scribe," that is, a recognized teacher of the law. Even the official teachers and religious leaders were not always averse to granting the title to him (Mark 12:14; John 3:2). It is clear that Jesus accepted the role of teacher as an important part of his mission, and although there were sharp contrasts between his teaching and that of the official rabbis, he found it convenient for his purpose to be recognized as a teacher. The role enabled him to discuss those subjects which the conventions of the age had strictly confined to the teaching profession. Thus he was not only granted freedom of speech but was permitted to address synagogue congregations. Further, it was the practice of the rabbis to surround themselves with groups of disciples and to travel in their company. Jesus was thus enabled to gather his group about him without exciting the suspicion of the Roman officials, whose duty it was to maintain the existing order of things—the Pax Romana—by silencing seditious protests and discouraging subversive activities. Some seem to think that Jesus' adoption of the calling of a rabbi helped to solve the problem of his subsistence. It was customary for prominent rabbis to be maintained by devout women of wealth, and the fact that Luke gives the names of some of the women "which ministered unto him of their substance" (8:3) suggests that Jesus availed himself of this means of support. But against this it may be urged that the needs, however simple, of thirteen men would be altogether too great to be supplied by this method. Admittedly some of the disciples were probably wealthy men (Mark 1:20; Matt. 9:9), but it is improbable that the rest



lived at their expense. John says that the group had a common bag or purse (12:6), from which they purchased necessities (Mark 8:14; Matt. 16:5; John 4:8) and gave to the poor (Matt. 26:9; John 13:29). The most reasonable supposition is that they all contributed a just share to the common fund from money they had earned or accumulated. It is difficult to think that Jesus, who denounced those rabbis who "devoured widows' houses," would expose himself to the same criticism.

### A DEFINITION OF HIS PREACHING

What is preaching? Many and varied have been the answers to this question. One says that it is "persuasion"; another describes it as "animated conversation"; and a third declares that it is "the making and mending of men"—all of which are correct but inadequate. Even the apostolic answer is specialized and therefore exclusive. The word for "preach" means to perform the office of a herald,<sup>3</sup> to proclaim with authority a message with which one has been entrusted. This was the role of the Old Testament prophets. They considered themselves to be spokesmen of Yahweh. The verb in our translations of the New Testament is normally rendered "preach," but according to some modern scholars the verb does not mean to deliver a sermon but to proclaim an event, and that event was the coming of God's redemptive rule in Jesus Christ. So although the noun "preaching" may signify either the act of proclamation or the thing proclaimed, the latter meaning is the more common in the New Testament. The emphasis falls on the content of the preaching rather than on its form. Dogmatic influences therefore seek to distinguish preaching from teaching, which denotes moral and

<sup>3</sup> κήρυξ, whence κηρύσσω and κήρυγμα.



spiritual instruction for those who have already accepted the preaching.

To be generally acceptable, a definition or a description must embrace all kinds of preaching possessing certain generally recognized essential elements. What are these elements? Phillips Brooks declares that there are two—truth and personality. And he defines preaching as the mediation of truth through personality. What better description of our Lord's preaching can we find! It is wide enough to contain both the preaching of the prophets and that of the apostles. The prophets proclaimed what Yahweh had revealed to them, either by way of a vision, in a dream, through an experience, or in some historical event. The apostles testified, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life . . . declare we unto you" (I John 1:1, 3).

These early preachers were not messengers only; they were witnesses. The New Testament uses another word<sup>4</sup> to describe this kind of preaching—"bear witness, testify." These were preachers who had experienced the truth they had to proclaim. Their message had entered into their lives and had become part of their personalities. And all this is made plain in the preaching of Jesus. The rainbow arch of God's truth was seen by men through the prism of Jesus' personality. Although these two elements are so perfectly blended that we may not separate them without doing violence to their unity, let us make an abstraction to see their unity more clearly.

### Truth

In speaking to his disciples of the unique depth and intimacy of his communion with the Father, Jesus claimed to

<sup>4</sup> μαρτυρέω and its cognates.

know him in a way that no one else had known him, and to be able to make the Father real to men in the same sense that the Father was real to Jesus. This so-called "Johannine" passage (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22) has been one of the storm centers of synoptic controversy. At this stage, however, we can confidently accept the passage as being historically reliable. Since it stands in Q, its documentary authority is as high as that of any other passage in the Gospels. The precise wording may still be debated, but even if the contentious clause is omitted, and "hath known" is substituted for "knoweth," the thought of the passage is untouched. It then reads, "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father, and no one hath known the Father [or who the Father is], save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." In this Jesus states no thesis concerning his nature and attributes, but simply declares that he can reveal God's will because he stands in a filial relation to him. Nor does he refer to any essential knowledge of the Father enjoyed by the eternal Son, which the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel seems to claim. He refers rather to that knowledge, which may best be described as "communion with God," which was bound up with, and part of, his filial consciousness. It was experiential knowledge—the knowledge, more perfect and intimate than any had ever before possessed, which he had gained in his earthly life through his filial communion with the Father. If this be so—the evidence seems to confirm it—then the words "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father" do not refer to cosmic power but to religious knowledge and insight. There is no suggestion in the context of sovereign power being committed unto Jesus, and, in any case, it would have been irrelevant to the situation. The "all things" signifies the fullness of spiritual apprehension which he is conscious of possessing. This he knows himself to have received, not from



tradition, like the rabbinical teachers, but by direct contact with the Father, in virtue of his filial communion.

### *Personality*

It may be said, in the phraseology of Phillips Brooks, that the truth came over the rabbinical teachers, but it came *through* Jesus. They sheltered behind the experience and the scholarship of others. They had their authorities but no authority. Jesus, however, made no appeal to tradition and claimed no external authority. He taught, not as a pedagogue who had learned something from someone else, but as an artist who had seen the vision for himself. The difference between them was the difference between erudition and intuition, between traditionalism and originality. Those who listened to Jesus found in his words a clarity of vision, a depth of understanding, and an intimacy of knowledge that they found in no other teacher. They recognized his authority, not because they recognized him to be properly accredited to give authoritative rulings and interpretations as were the official rabbis, but because of the truth they saw in him, and the "Amen" that echoed in their own hearts to what he said. No one accepted the truth from Jesus for any lower reason than because it appealed to his spiritual sense as true. In this respect there seems to be a ring of authentication in John's record of Peter's words: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (6:68).

Man is a unity, at his best a unified and balanced personality, and the preaching of Jesus involved the whole of him—physical, mental, and spiritual. The truth came through his whole personality. He represented wholeness in every sense of the term; both his words and his deeds chimed in perfect harmony. In him, according to John's doctrine, "the Logos was made flesh" not only as a general principle but in detail.

## A SYNAGOGUE PREACHER AND LEADER IN WORSHIP

The origin of the synagogue as a characteristic institution of Judaism is hidden in obscurity, but the probability is that it arose in the Babylonian exile. Its development in Israel during the closing century of the Persian rule, 430-330 B.C., is well authenticated. It enabled the Jews to express their expanding spiritual experiences which the suffering and discipline of exile had brought forth. It met the need for systematic instruction in the Law of Moses, which in the reform of Ezra and Nehemiah had been accepted as the norm of faith and life. And it provided a pulpit from which a leader, by his conduct of a simple service of prayer, scripture reading, and exposition, fostered in men's hearts the spirit of worship and made the presence of a holy God a living reality.

A definite though gradual transformation in the religious life of Israel followed the establishment of the synagogue services. Worship, which until the Babylonian exile had practically meant sacrifice in the temple at Jerusalem, now became common prayer and praise. It was the outpouring of the heart rather than the shedding of sacrificial blood. The contrasts between the synagogue and the temple were significant. In the synagogue a religious community, a congregation, under the instruction of a leader or a preacher poured out its heart in a fellowship of prayer and thanksgiving. In the temple a solemn assembly witnessed a priest at a sacrificial altar perform mystic rites, the meaning of which varied with men's thought of God. To some it was a gift to reconcile Yahweh; to others it was a sin offering; and to others still, the more spiritual, it was symbolic of the cleansing of their hearts. The focal point of the synagogue was the raised pulpit in which a preacher or a teacher stood with an offering from God to men; the essential center of the temple was the altar at which a priest officiated with an offering from men to God. The



preacher used reason, appealed to conscience, and aimed at righteousness. His purpose was to nurture man's spiritual nature and to produce a character made vital with inward power through communion with God. The priest used ritual and sought by processes of ceremonial etiquette not only to gain for his people God's favorable consideration but also to make possible a means of communication between God and man. Both the synagogue and the temple were founded on the belief that somehow God and man could communicate, and in this they were united.

### *Jesus and the Synagogue*

Jesus was a synagogue preacher. The references to his synagogue preaching and teaching are, as we have seen, many and indisputable. He found a place for himself in the synagogue but not in the temple. In spite of the scribal emphasis on the letter of the Law, the synagogue sought to develop the moral and the spiritual life of its members. It provided a pulpit from which the moral ideal in an educative administration of religion could be heard. There can be no doubt that Jesus thought of the synagogue as a place where he could instruct the people in the things of God. It was along this line that he was able to develop one of his main themes: the perfection of man as a son of God. Jesus was a child of the synagogue, and he was more at home there than in the temple with its grandeurs and its squalors (Mark 11:15; Matt. 21:12-13).

There appears to be some inconsistency in our Lord's attitude toward the temple and the sacrificial system. On the one hand he evidences a great love and reverence for the temple, and on the other there are references, equally decisive, in which the temple and its worship are regarded as of quite subordinate importance. His frequent appearance at the temple cannot have been only for the purpose of teaching, for while it is true that the Gospels never directly record an



instance of his offering sacrifice, there can be little doubt that, in view of his devout home training, he fulfilled the duties incumbent upon every true Israelite. We know he observed the Jewish feasts, and his own words as to the celebration of the Passover (Luke 22:7 ff.) clearly show his attitude toward the sacrificial system generally. Then on several occasions he distinctly enjoins the fulfillment of the law of sacrifice (Mark 1:44=Matt. 8:4=Luke 5:14; Luke 17:14, L). Yet he speaks of himself as "greater than the temple" (Matt. 12:6), and in the same passage he quotes from Hosea (6:6), "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." In the parable of the good Samaritan we have an illustration of Jesus' thought of the priesthood (Luke 10:31). Most striking, however, is his reply to those who lavished praise on the beauty of the temple, "Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Mark 13:2).

This apparently contradictory attitude may be explained in two ways. First, our Lord's thought of the temple and its worship was determined by his apocalyptic expectations. This is distinctly seen in that immediately after the prediction of the destruction of the temple he recounts the signs that shall precede his second coming. Whatever eschatological ideas he held, it is clear that his belief that the end was near at hand caused him to regard the temple and all that pertained to it as being of a temporary character and of relatively minor importance. He thought of it as an institution that had had its day and would soon cease to be. Second, the attitude is to be explained by the ever-widening conceptions he experienced regarding his own person and mission. In the early part of his life the influence of his Jewish upbringing and environment is clearly marked, but as the realization of his filial relation and the cosmic character of his mission developed, there came a widening of his perspective and outlook.

It is one thing to see clearly and to enunciate great princi-



ples, but it is something entirely different to seize upon all their true applications to the manifold diversities of human life. Jesus had to learn by personal experience and deep thought the applications of his own principles. Significantly, however, he omitted sacrifice from his teaching. His thought centered around a different conception of God. Your heavenly Father has not to be persuaded by your gifts, he taught, but "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The whole idea of sacrifice as a means of appeasing the wrath or securing the forgiveness of God was altogether alien to his teaching. Long before he "cleansed" the temple and symbolically expressed his disapproval of the corruptions of the sacrificial system and his conviction of its inevitable dissolution, he had undermined the foundations upon which the sacrificial system had been erected. Like the eighth-century prophets, he insisted that the essential thing in approaching God was a humble and a contrite heart. The only sacrifice he advocated was self-sacrifice—the giving of self in service for others—accordingly the prerequisites of forgiveness were not priests, altars, and beasts but repentance, faith, and love. Wherever these moral conditions were found, forgiveness followed. There was no place in his conception of God for a priest, an intercessor, or a mediator. The implications of his teaching are that every man has equal access to the Father, and that no man is qualified to stand in the place of another in the holy temple of worth. His central thought may be summarized thus: The wonder and mystery of our Father God is this, that he wants man infinitely more than man wants him, that it is he, not man, who makes the offering, and that it is man, not he, who must be reconciled.

Whatever difficulties there may be in interpreting our Lord's attitude toward the temple and the sacrificial system, two facts stand out clearly in his preaching: he did not go back from the stage of the synagogue to that of the temple,

nor did he fall short of the great prophets of his race. After we have sat at the feet of Jesus, all priestly theory of sacrifice and offering is forever obsolete.

### *Sacramental Preaching*

In the days of his flesh the synagogue service probably began with the recitation of the Shema<sup>5</sup> by the congregation. After this, a chosen leader said the prayers, the worshipers repeating the "Amen" at the end of each collect. This liturgical part was followed by the reading of extracts from the Law and the Prophets, which were translated from the Hebrew into Aramaic, the vernacular. The exposition or the sermon came next. There was full liberty of prophesying, and any member of the congregation was free to exercise his gift. Unlike the temple worship, the worship of the synagogue was under the control of the laity. A priest as such had no privilege except to pronounce the benediction with which the service was closed.

To the ancient world a religion without an image, an altar, a priest, and a sacrifice was unthinkable. Titus was swayed by this thought when he destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. With the destruction of the holy city and its shrine he thought that the religion of Judaism would perish too, but he was mistaken. Judaism could and did survive because of the synagogue, and what is more, from it came two other living religions—Mohammedanism and Christianity.

It appears that the service was so planned that the approach to God through acts of praise and prayer prepared the worshiper for the central act of worship—the reading of scripture and the sermon. Worship reached its highest point when the worshiper, prepared in heart and mind, heard the

<sup>5</sup> The name comes from the opening word, "Hear." It comprised Deut. 6:4; 11:13-21; Num. 37:41.



voice of God speaking to him through the preacher. As we have seen, the preacher's place in the synagogue was not sacerdotal, but it could be sacramental. Long ago P. T. Forsyth argued that this ought to be the preacher's place in the church. The call to preach is essentially a call to do a sacramental thing—to give God to the people in preaching. To the preacher is accorded, as to no other public speaker or teacher, the right to deal with the highest, the deepest, the most intimate, and the most sacred facts of men's inner lives. His function is essentially sacramental. His work is not merely to enlighten but to empower and to enhance. He is augmentative, not simply illuminative. He is—or he ought to be—the living element for the distribution and increment of God's grace.

Jesus was a sacramental preacher. He not only led the people in the central act of synagogical worship but, judging from the reports of his preaching generally, mediated God to them and gave them the sense of his presence. He was concerned, not to make God probable to men, but to make him real; not to make him known as an article of faith, but to make him known as the object of faith. Hence he sought to break down all barriers which prevented men from realizing God. If in the temple God was known in mystery, in preaching Jesus made God known in the clear light of articulate thought; if in the temple the worshiper felt that his sacrifice had done something in the world unseen, in preaching Jesus made the worshiper feel that something had been done in himself. To Jesus preaching was not something merely to be said, but something to be done. His object was not just to expound or to proclaim religious faith but to produce it in his listeners. And so far as one man's vital experience of God can be transmitted to another, Jesus transmitted his experience. If the words "I am the bread of life" in John cannot be accepted as the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, we can say that



they contain a true spiritual insight into the work of Jesus. Those who listened to him preach with any eagerness of heart or mind were not only clearer but greater, not only surer but stronger, not only interested, instructed, and affected but fed and increased. There is no doubt about the deep spiritual insight of the writer of the Fourth Gospel. He presents Jesus not merely as the Truth but also as the Life. The words of Jesus do not come with power to the intellect alone; they also appeal to the heart and influence the will. "They are spirit and they are life." (6:63.) They pass into the soul of man and there quicken and create new life (ch. 3). His truth liberates and saves, and those who receive it into their hearts and minds are thereby raised to a higher and a nobler life of righteousness and are endued with power to become "sons of God" (1:12).

Preaching should therefore be regarded as the central part of Christian worship. It is not to be treated as a gratuitous adjunct to a liturgical service in a sacerdotal shrine. It is sacramental. That is not to say, of course, that we should not welcome and encourage all that emphasizes the sheer value of worship and strives by rituals, forms, and symbols to foster a finer spirit of adoration in the hearts of men. Beautiful churches, grand music, dignified forms, and suggestive symbols help to create an atmosphere in which the sacrament of preaching, the highest form of worship, may be administered. Church services ought to lure the most careless with their simple beauty, arouse the most hardened with their resistless appeal, and give to the most materialistic the consciousness that they have been in touch with things unseen; but this cannot be realized unless and until the sacramental function of preaching is acknowledged and attained. A church service becomes a retreat from ethics to aesthetics—if not anesthetics—when the sacramental function of preaching is ignored. Our great need is not to seek various imitations of, or approxima-



tions to, that which is offered by the so-called sacerdotal churches, whose worship is patterned on the temple, but to grasp anew our Lord's conception of preaching, and to mediate the Father God he revealed, confirmed in our own experience, to the men of our age.

## 2

*A Preacher Prepared*

LITTLE MENTION IS MADE BY THE SYNOPTISTS OF THE PREPARATION of Jesus for his ministry. Luke sums up the scanty recollections of his childhood, youth, and young manhood in the words: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (2:52). The language implies that in the normal way his mental development kept pace with his physical growth from infancy to maturity. Most suggestive, however, is the verb "increase"<sup>1</sup> which Luke uses. It was used originally for a pioneer cutting his way through the undergrowth of a virgin forest. The word suggests a picture of Jesus cutting a track through his problems and experiences and by continued effort achieving an all-round development. It is evident that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews had some such idea when he wrote that Jesus was made "perfect through sufferings" (2:10), but this statement needs to be expanded. Suffering was only one of many factors that contributed to the perfecting of Jesus. Every new situation necessitated an adjustment and taught a new duty. As he passed through the ever-changing experiences of life and met with men under varying conditions, he received new impressions, new viewpoints, and new ideas. Life's discipline and experience not only deepened his insight into, and understanding of, his Father's purpose but also, of necessity, produced a corresponding development in his own life and teaching.

The glimpse Luke gives us of the boy Jesus in the temple is revealing. It tells that the temple scholars were impressed with

<sup>1</sup> προκόπτω.



his precocious interest in their specialized knowledge and "astonished at his understanding." Further, though it may be argued that the glimpse is altogether too fleeting for us to recognize even a faint glimmer of that filial consciousness which burst into glowing flame at his baptism, it is adequate for us to recognize in it a consciousness of God and an urge to serve his purposes.

While we have no specific information other than this, and we recognize that even this is peculiar to Luke, we may by careful study of the prepared preacher discover something of his preparation. We shall be concerned therefore with the implicit rather than with the explicit significance of certain events, deeds, and utterances which, though the synoptists may have been unaware of it, tells something of Jesus' preparation during the so-called years of silence. For instance, our knowledge of the religious experience of Jesus begins at the moment he comes out of Jordan and sees a vision and hears a voice. The Marcan account makes it clear that the story came from Jesus himself, for it was Jesus, and he alone, who saw "the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him," and who heard a voice from heaven saying, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (1:11). For our purpose, the significance of this crucial religious experience at his baptism is implicit. Although we have no detailed knowledge of what went before it, we do know with some certainty that it was vitally related to, and bound up with, his past religious experiences. Our knowledge of his spiritual life during his ministry and our understanding of our own enable us to see his Jordan experience as the culmination of an intense and prolonged process of spiritual development.

## HIS SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

The essential preparation of any preacher is not so much the preparation of his material as the preparation of himself. A preacher's prime qualification is the possession of a burning enthusiasm for his calling. The author of *Ecce Homo* has truly said, "No heart is pure that is not passionate. No virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic." Etymologically, the term "enthusiasm" means "having God within." The phrase in the Acts (6:3) "full of the Holy Ghost,"<sup>2</sup> where the definite article is absent in the Greek, may be rendered "full of holy enthusiasm." This suggestion may be followed in interpreting the experience of Jesus. It may be claimed that he entered on his ministry full of holy enthusiasm. When he applied to himself the words of Deutero-Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me" (61:1; Luke 4:18), it was the possession of the fullness, freedom, and freshness of the spiritual life which he claimed for himself, and this view is entirely in accord with the Old Testament conception of prophetic inspiration.

There are three words in the Hebrew which refer to the prophet. Two<sup>3</sup> of these mean "seer," and the third<sup>4</sup> comes from a root which may mean "bubble up, speak ecstatically," or more likely, "announce." Thus it may mean, and is generally interpreted, "commissioned preacher." Here then are the essential elements: spiritual insight, perception, an intense personal experience, and the irrepressible, passionate proclamation of the things seen, felt, experienced. No one is fit to proclaim the things of God who does not live in the presence of God. A worshiper once said to Alexander Whyte, "You spoke as if you came straight from the Presence."

<sup>2</sup> πλήρεις πνεύματος.

<sup>3</sup> חזה and ראה.

<sup>4</sup> נביא.



"Perhaps I did," he answered shyly. This was the impression Jesus made upon the disciples. His knowledge of God was immediate and intimate. He was sure he knew God in a way till then unrealized by men, a way that empowered him for his mission, and a way that enabled him to reveal God to others.

### *His Filial Consciousness*

Jesus always spoke of God as "Father." He used the word more freely and more personally and more naturally than anyone had done before. His approach to God was as natural and as normal as a son's approach to his father. The most striking thing about his religious life was its naturalness. There was nothing suggestive of religiosity about him—no sacerdotal assumptions, no whining accents, and no conventional phrases. His spirituality can never be identified with quietism and passivity, for it was too vital, too vigorous, and too objective. Psychiatrists may search, but they will search in vain, for anything in the least psychopathic or abnormal about him. Yet he speaks freely of seeing God; he lives his life in closest communion with God; and God is the center of his thoughts. Compared with the spiritual experiences of the great saints and mystics of the race, the experience of Jesus was constant, not intermittent. The whole direction of his life and character, the whole bent of his thought and motive were towards God.

He used the term "Son" to set forth his relationship to God. All other facts about his life are conditioned by, and get their meaning from, this sense of his filial relationship. The tremendous personal claims he made, his air of authority, his magisterial attitude in his criticism of the Law, all spring from it. On his lips it was a symbol, a metaphor taken from human relations, to indicate a spiritual reality. It was ethical through and through, and it was made up of those qualities which make life filial—love, trust, obedience. Fur-

ther, it was a personal rather than an official relation that is indicated. The relationship belongs to the realm of experience and practical religion, and not to the realm of speculative philosophy. When seeking evidence of the unique sonship of Jesus some look for certain metaphysical attributes that are supposed to belong more essentially to the divine nature. It is not in the metaphysical, however, but in the ethical that the evidence is to be found. All the evangelists testify that Jesus did many mighty works, and he himself frankly acknowledged that he had the power to perform them, but he did not regard this power as evidence of his sonship. Indeed, even according to the writer of the Fourth Gospel, who colored his interpretation of Jesus in the metaphysics of his day, Jesus promised his disciples that they would be able to do not only the works he did but even greater ones (14:12).

Although the growth of his inner life is almost unrevealed, we do know, if our conception of his sonship is correct, that his consciousness of his filial relationship could have come only after a prolonged period of discipline. Only thus could he learn to become obedient to the will of the Father and develop the qualities of love and trust. The conclusion is that these lessons were learned and these qualities were developed during the preparatory period of which we know so little. Again, if we are called to share his filial life, and the term "Son" is employed to cover his experience and ours, it is reasonable to conclude that the relationship into which he brings men with the Father is somehow identical with, or analogous to, his own. We learn, therefore, something about his discovery of God and his filial relationship from his thought of our sonship. Summarizing the synoptic teaching we learn that conformity to God's will, likeness to him in moral motives and action, constitutes men sons of God. God is perfectly good; he blesses all, the unjust as well as the just. We become sons of God by becoming like him. This likeness of men to



God in its perfection involves completeness of love. If it were along these lines that Jesus made his discovery of God and realized his sonship, we may well marvel at the spiritual completeness of his preparation. When through the eyes of the gospel writers we see him engaged in his work, he is prepared to meet any and every demand made upon him. He is thoroughly efficient, sure of his technique, unhesitating in his judgments, serenely poised, and master both of himself and the situation. So although the records do not tell anything directly or in detail of his spiritual preparation, we are able not only to recognize the fact of it but also to see something of its thoroughness, depth, and intensity.

Further, he maintained his spiritual life by private prayer, by devotional reading of the Scriptures, and by public worship. May we not think that these factors played a prominent part in his preparation?

#### HIS INTELLECTUAL PREPARATION

The education of Jesus, though it was probably more than the average Jewish child received, no doubt did not differ in method or principle from the educational practice of his time. The Jews attached great importance to the education of their children. Josephus spoke for most parents of the period when he said, "Our ground is good, and we work it to the utmost; but our chief ambition is for the education of our children." Jewish law impressed upon parents, especially upon fathers, the duty of instructing their children in the knowledge of God, his mighty acts, his laws, and also of disciplining them in religion and morality. Hebrew education aimed at the formation of character, and it centered around the subjects of religion and ethics. Its only textbook was the Old Testament, but even so it was a national literature; and it was a fine instrument of education in that it had power to inspire idealism, to quicken the

spiritual nature, and to enrich life with noble conceptions of duty and destiny. All education that is something more than the mere acquisition of knowledge is not only a mental but also a cultural and a spiritual development. It involves learning how to think, how to judge, how to act, how to develop and to discipline the emotions so that they are built around worthy objects and ideals.

When a Jewish boy reached the age of five or six years, he was sent to a primary school at the local synagogue, which, since the subject was the Book of the Law, was styled the House of the Book, that is, the Scriptures. The three R's—reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic—were also taught. In some districts of Palestine, Galilee for instance, where the Greek language was the *lingua franca*, that tongue might possibly have been included in the syllabus. But even if Greek was not taught, Hebrew may have been. The evidence, however, seems to suggest that classical Hebrew was not generally taught. If it was, why was it necessary in the synagogue to give a Targum, that is, a translation from Hebrew to Aramaic, of the Old Testament? The Hebrew of the Old Testament was not the Hebrew (Aramaic) that the people spoke in their homes (Mark 5:41). If only the mother tongue was used, then the Scriptures were read—or verbally taught—in a Targum.

As in our modern schools, there were age groups with their own special studies. The addition to Aboth entitled "The Ages of Man" says, "At five years old, Scripture: at ten years, Mishnah: at thirteen, the Commandments." A prominent feature of the teaching was learning by rote, and that audibly, for the Jewish teachers were thorough believers in the Latin maxim, *Repetitio mater studiorum*.

Only those youths who desired to pursue their studies further and become teachers themselves passed into a scribal college, styled the House of the Midrash—a midrash may be defined as an imaginative development of a thought or theme



suggested by scripture, especially a didactic or homiletic exposition, or an edifying religious story. There were several of these colleges in Palestine. The principal one was located at Jerusalem, and it met within the temple precincts, probably in the temple synagogue. On that memorable occasion when he attained the age of twelve years and became "a son of the Law," Jesus sat at the feet of the rabbis in this particular college at Jerusalem (Luke 2:46).

The students were employed in the study of the oral Law—the tradition of the elders (Matt. 5:2)—which in those days was regarded with even greater veneration than the written Law, and which was preserved in the memories of the rabbis and orally transmitted. A truly remarkable achievement! Here too the chief feature of the teaching was *mishnah*, that is, repetition, the lesson being repeated over and over again until it was fixed in the memory, and proficiency lay in faithful reproduction of the *ipsissima verba* of the tradition.

This mnemonic drill, however, was not the sole employment. Difficulties, both real and fanciful, were elucidated by the rabbis. Sometimes the study of the Law was pushed to the point of absurdity. Experts in quip and quibble debated trivial points at great length with citations, precedents, and references. But even so it would be unfair and incorrect to dismiss all scribal learning as fatuous and futile. Paul was a product of the scribal college at Jerusalem, and this fact was something Paul himself thought worthy of mention (Acts 22:3). He considered it something of an honor to have been educated at the feet of Gamaliel.

Tradition has it that Joseph died when Jesus was about fourteen years of age, and that as the eldest son Jesus had to take his father's place in the workshop. Of this there is no direct evidence, but whatever the reason, the records seem to suggest that he was never a student in any of the main scribal schools. The Fourth Gospel undoubtedly contributes to this

impression. The writer would have us believe that the intellectual snobs among the college-trained men treated Jesus with disdain because he lacked their accent. He reports (8:48) that they called Jesus "a Samaritan"—literally, "a child of the devil, a heretic"—which was a nickname they had for one who never had sat at the feet of the rabbis. And on one occasion, he says, when the Jews heard Jesus' discoursing in the temple court, they marveled, saying, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (7:15.)

We recognize that care must be taken in estimating the value of this evidence. John presents Jesus in the role of a controversialist, and the picture we get of him in this respect is most unlike the synoptic picture of Jesus as a gracious teacher. Whatever the explanation is, there is strong synoptic evidence to show that Jesus was familiar not only with the exegetical methods and terminology of the rabbinical schools but also with their peculiar Hebrew. He was able to meet college men in debate on their own ground and hold his own (Mark 12:28-37), which supports the view that Jesus had learned.

### *Knowledge of Languages and Rabbinic Methods*

Jesus' strong condemnation of the scribal refinements of the Law at least suggests that he was familiar with them and had found them wanting. We are told that his teaching differed from that of the scribes (Mark 1:22=Matt. 7:29), and the possibility of his taking up an attitude different from, or hostile to, that of the scribes implies an acquaintance with their methods. Further, he was addressed as *rabbi* not only by his own disciples (Mark 4:38; 9:30) or by members of the public (9:17) but by the learned themselves (12:14, 32). Does not this show that he was recognized as a competent scholar even by his opponents?

The language of the scribal colleges differed from that of the Old Testament, which was in the time of Jesus a dead



language used only for liturgical purposes. The Jews, according to G. F. Moore,<sup>5</sup> were aware of the difference and designated one "the language of the Bible" and the other "the language of the scholars." He contends that the language of the scribal schools was neither simply a degenerate Hebrew whose idiom was disintegrated by the influence of the Aramaic vernacular nor an artificial language, a kind of academic jargon. It was a scholastic language which had its roots not only in biblical Hebrew but in living speech and was developed and adapted to serve as a medium for technical definition and discussion. Because this Hebrew was better fitted than the classical for the juristic precision which the rabbinical colleges aimed at, it was used as the language of learned debate. As Jesus certainly used the exegetical methods and terminology of the rabbinical schools, it seems quite probable that in discussion and dispute with the scribes he used this language.

#### *Practical Efficiency*

In order to appreciate the disciplined years of study he must have devoted to it, we need not know where or under what circumstances Jesus acquired this learning. The price of efficiency is always a high one. It was our Lord himself who emphasized the fact that the road that leads to life is narrow and close (Matt. 7:14). So is the way to pulpit efficiency. There are no short cuts, no roads of easy grade, to this high level; there are, if efficiency is to be achieved, only toil and unslacking effort. In those years of preparation the life of Jesus must have been ordered by a high purpose. To his ministry he brought a trained and an informed mind. Never once does he parade his learning, but he does reveal it in the greatness of his simplicity, in the mastery of his subject, and in the truthfulness of his judgment. It is easy for a preacher to skim over literature, to display a few battered ornaments of pulpit

<sup>5</sup> *Judaism*, I, 99-100.

rhetoric, to memorize a number of classical quotations, to have a smattering of magazine science, and to cultivate a dashing or impressive style of speech—in short, to make a show of learning—but these things can never be mistaken for, or take the place of, the qualities that are the possession of the truly disciplined and informed mind.

Judging by what our Lord reveals in himself, we may note that the aim of his mental preparation was not academic distinction but practical efficiency. His studies were the means to an end, not ends in themselves. He learned classical Hebrew that he might read the Scriptures; he mastered rabbinical Hebrew that he might study the oral Law and discuss contemporary interpretations.

Obviously, these languages are not essential to men preparing to preach today. It is an advantage, of course, for a preacher to know enough Greek to be at home in his Greek New Testament and to know sufficient Hebrew to use intelligently a commentary on the original text of the Old Testament. Further, a thorough knowledge of these languages will enable him to examine the theories continually being presented by the experts. Remembering, however, that our Lord's aim was practical efficiency, we may question whether a dominantly linguistic course of study can give the preacher the kind of knowledge, appreciation, and approach that modern standards of efficiency demand. The mental discipline that the study of Greek, Hebrew, and Latin demands of, and develops in, a student is not in dispute, although some educationalists are not sure that this type of study does confer the mental benefit that was once attributed to it. The relative worth of a dominantly linguistic course compared with one calculated to equip a preacher's mind with the knowledge necessary to meet contemporary needs must be considered.

For good or ill we are living in the vestibule of the atomic age, and a preacher cannot ignore the principles and theories



of physical science. He should be familiar with, and have respect for, the scientific approach to reality. In view, too, of the widespread demand for some form of social security, the many theories and experimentations, and the focus of public interest on economics and politics, the sociological subjects must surely find a place in a preacher's training course. Can a preacher be efficient today without a thorough knowledge of psychology? And is it not also imperative that he should know something about ethics, philosophy, literature, and possess a comprehensive view of history?

This is but an outline of the minimum requirements of a modern preacher. The present situation demands a high standard of efficiency. The increased facilities for higher education, the insistence in trades and professions upon technical diplomas and certificates, the extension of forms of adult education, the almost universal use of radio, greatly improved transportational facilities linking remote country districts with towns and cities, the publication of cheap editions of authoritative works on literary and scientific and ethicoreligious subjects, and the increasing emphasis laid by prominent educationalists upon the inadequacy of purely secular systems of education—all combine to increase the need for a better equipped pulpit ministry. The requirements of the other professions—medical, legal, technical—are now extremely severe. Dare the preparation of a modern minister be less? In these days an inefficient doctor, lawyer, teacher, or tradesman is a sorry creature, but an inefficient preacher is a tragedy—to himself and to his people.

### *Mastery of the Hebrew Scriptures*

A preacher's true efficiency reveals itself in his knowledge and use of the Bible. Our Lord's knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures was both extensive and profound. In the Synoptic Gospels there are eighty-seven quotations by him from the

Old Testament.<sup>6</sup> They cover all five books of the Law, and in the second division of the Hebrew canon the only books not cited are Joshua, Judges, Second Samuel, Amos, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Haggai. From the writings there are quotations from Psalms, Job, and Daniel. As we recall the fragmentary nature of the records, the number of books directly quoted by Jesus is impressive. His favorite books were those in which the highest spiritual levels are to be found. Deuteronomy, in which the Law is most spiritually set forth, made strong appeal to him. It was with quotations from it that he met the assaults of Satan in his temptation; and when Jesus declared the essence of the Law to those who asked for it, he stated it almost invariably in the Deuteronomic form. His quotations from the Psalms and his conscious and unconscious use of their phraseology is indicative of his grasp upon them. Among his favorite prophets were Hosea and Isaiah. So complete was his knowledge of the Scriptures that he could sum up the whole trend of many books in a single sentence, as in his famous Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12); and in those discourses which contain the body of his teaching, the influence of the Scriptures is evident in both his ideas and words. In the magnificent prophetic pictures of the invasion of human life by God's Spirit he saw his own work foreshadowed, and in the more spiritual messianic conceptions of the seers of Israel he saw himself.

Only by years of hard study, clear, honest thinking, quiet contemplation, and much prayer for guidance could he have achieved such a mastery of the spirit and letter of the Old Testament. Without the aid of the keen instruments of historical and literary criticism and the vast wealth of reverent scholarship at the disposal of the modern preacher, he went directly to the heart of Scripture and grasped its essential

<sup>6</sup> Some give Mark thirty-seven, Q twelve, M twenty-eight, and L ten.



truth. Even from the scanty references it is clear that he was able to employ at will illustrations from what might be considered remote and unlikely incidents in the national story (Luke 4:25-27; 6:3-4; 11:9-32; 20:37). He was familiar, too, with the great revealing personalities and the lesser characters of Scripture. His attitude toward the Old Testament may be described as one of mingled reverence and independence. He subjected himself to its spiritual authority, but he always reserved the right to judge for himself. It is said that we find in Jesus a reasonable and constructive critical-mindedness linked with a direct and spontaneous creative-mindedness. Exercising a rare discrimination, he selected those portions of Scripture that seemed to harmonize with the spirit of the kingdom he had come to declare and rejected those that failed to embody that spirit in its highest form. He recognized that the revelation in the Old Testament was what we call "a progressive revelation," and he had no hesitation in setting aside some of the earlier precepts and substituting others of his own (Matt. 5-6). Distinguishing between significant principles and negligible elements, he rated ceremonial law low and ethical law high. Ritual requirements he submitted to the test of human need, quoting moral texts against ceremonial ones to show that God preferred mercy to sacrifice (Hos. 6:6; Matt. 9:13; 12:7). He was "the first free spiritual expounder of the Scriptures."

#### *An Acquaintance With Apocalyptic Literature*

It is no longer doubted that our Lord's preparation included a knowledge of at least some of the extracanonical books. Most scholars are of the opinion that the books of Enoch and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs must be included among the books that influenced Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount we find the teaching of the Twelve Patriarchs accepted and lifted into a higher plane and the doctrine of forgiveness

carried to its final stage of development. R. H. Charles finds significance in the fact that it was not from Judea, the stronghold of pharisaic legalism, but from Galilee, the land of the apocalyptic mystic and seer, that Jesus and eleven of his disciples had their origin and derived their religious background. Apparently the "revelation" books had a popular appeal, especially in those parts that were removed from the center of official Judaism in Jerusalem. And judging from the developed religious ideas we find in the Gospels and the strong apocalyptic elements in the teaching of Jesus himself, we may think that he was familiar with this literature. The similarity of language in the Gospels to that of the apocalyptic literature is so strong that when the student turns from his study of the latter, he is amazed to find that there is nothing, or almost nothing, new or fresh in the figurative language of the Gospels.

To sum up his intellectual preparation, we may think that Jesus availed himself of every opportunity to inform his mind on all subjects relative to his future work for God. His main study, however, was the Old Testament. It was the true background of his life. What he came to be or to reveal beyond the Old Testament stage of moral and spiritual development stands in organic connection with it. Other factors in his intellectual preparation need to be remembered and their influence fully estimated: the historical situation, the political and economic environment, the cosmopolitan character of his native Galilee—that "busy international corridor"—the natural world, especially the countryside of his boyhood and youth, and his home life.

### HIS PHYSICAL PREPARATION

Deutero-Isaiah's sublime picture of the "Servant of Yahweh" who was bruised and wounded for the sake of others, and who died that he might intercede for their transgressions (ch. 53),



undoubtedly influenced Jesus in his interpretation of his messianic mission. The voice he heard at his baptism was reminiscent of the prophetic apostrophe: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him" (42:1). And the record of his sermon at Nazareth tells that it was based on the same portion of prophetic literature (61:1; Luke 4:16-21). Isaiah 53 was not interpreted messianically, and there is nothing in the messianic expectations of the Old Testament or apocalyptic literature to suggest that the Messiah would suffer, but there can be little doubt that by the time of Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27-33) Jesus had fused the two ideas of the messiah and servant in his conception of the Son of man. But however true this may be, it is not possible to fit Jesus into the literal framework of Deutero-Isaiah's description. Jesus was not held in the grip of intense physical pain, nor was his physical appearance unattractive, still less repulsive, as one suffering from a loathsome disease. Only in the stories of his passion is there mention of his sufferings. The synoptists, in their descriptions of his active ministry, convey the impression that he was always physically fit, and that his body readily responded to the demands he made upon it. He had a healthy enjoyment of all of life's good gifts—fresh air and country places, food and drink, refreshing sleep that comes from hard work, and, above all, human companionship.

Roman Catholic art is not unjustly criticized for the irreparable injury it has done by imprinting on men's imagination a wrong impression of the physical form and features of Jesus. The languishing and aesthetic beauty of the face, with its pietistic and effeminate cast of countenance, is not discernible in the lineaments of the original as depicted in the Gospels. And in so far as Christian theology has presented him as a figure of tragedy and melancholy, it must share in the indictment. Though there is no explicit word in the narratives to

say that he smiled or laughed, the overwhelming impression is that he did both.

### A Carpenter

Early in life, it appears, Jesus became an apprentice under his father, and he entered the trade of a village carpenter (Mark 6:3). Trades were not as specialized then as today, and carpenters did practically all the constructive work both within and without the house; they were called upon to make everything from the rocker of the cradle to the bier for burial. Tools for labor, implements for farmers, and harness for beasts, all came within their sphere. The using of the tools associated with his trade—remember that the carpenter of that day processed his material from the standing tree—surely developed his muscles, hardened his body, and gave him physical stamina. We ought not be surprised to read, therefore, that he slept in the open without hurt and was in the habit of walking long distances.

Those who picture him as a frail man draw attention to the fact that on the cross he died in but a few hours. It was not usual for victims to succumb so quickly—they often lingered for days. That he died so soon is taken to mean that he was a delicate man, but against this we have the testimony of M (Matt. 21:12) that a few days before the Crucifixion he entered the temple and cleared the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sold doves. A strenuous undertaking for a delicate man! Those who picture Jesus as a tepid, anemic man should study the temple scene. Never did the volcanic forces in his nature blaze out more vehemently than in that hour, when he stood with a light in his eyes, before which both traders and money-changers shrank away. There was physical strength manifested as well as moral force. The dominant impression he made upon his enemies was not that of gentleness and meekness but of strength and courage.



Those with whom he had measured swords did not soon forget the keenness of his thrust. There is a significant statement in the Acts (4:13) which is worth attention as illustrative of this contention: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, . . . they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus." Stronger, however, is the implicit evidence in the report that on one occasion—a most significant occasion—Jesus asked his disciples what men thought of him, and Peter, answering for the rest, said that men thought he resembled Elijah. Now Elijah was one of the outstanding prophets of ancient Israel; he was a massive man, and this was he to whom some likened Jesus (Mark 8:28).

The cumulative impression we receive from all this is that Jesus brought to his ministry a disciplined body, robust health, and abounding physical energy. He was a dynamic man, strong and virile. It is true, of course, that a preacher's poor presence and stammering speech may seem glorified under the transforming touch of spiritual enthusiasm. But it is also true that a man with a fine, strong, attractive body and an eloquent tongue, under the transforming touch of spiritual enthusiasm, will be the greater preacher, all other things, of course, being equal. What was it that made Phillips Brooks a prince among preachers? He had a magnificent physique, a commanding presence, a countenance radiant with inward beauty, "a voice that rang with celestial tones, a torrent of eloquent speech, unquenchable, uncontrollable, which poured from his lips like a feshet from a living spring."

### *His Presence*

Oliver Wendell Holmes is reported to have said that he might have been a minister had not a certain preacher looked and talked so much like an undertaker. When a judgment is made that someone looks, talks, or acts like a preacher, it is usually with a sinister connotation. To some degree every man

carries the marks of his profession, but to a greater degree than any other the preacher carries the characteristic marks of his calling. In some these marks not only are apparent in their outward garb, with its distinctive cut, collar, and color, but obtrude in their bearing, parsonically impressive; in their manner, professionally unctuous; in their voice tones, altogether holy. Jesus, however, possessed none of these marks. He never adopted a pulpit pose or a holy tone. Yet his presence was at times full of a strange and commanding power, inspiring both awe and love. The Pharisees, bold at first in the insolence of their self-assertion, were gradually cowed by an overmastering sense of his greatness and nobility, till at last they drew back, silent and baffled (Matt. 22:46). On one occasion an angry synagogue congregation was strangely awed by his presence and, though bent on his destruction, held back, so that "he passed through the midst of them, and went his way" (Luke 4:30). Jesus' bearing at his trial was such that Pilate was filled with a sense of misgiving, causing him to cast the responsibility of the condemnation on the priestly party (Matt. 27:24); and on the cross, even as Jesus hung helpless, there was that about him which called forth from the officer in charge of the execution the admiring cry: "Certainly this was a righteous man" (Luke 23:47).

What was it about him that appealed so powerfully to men like Peter, James, John, and Andrew? Would fishermen of their type—blunt, rugged, independent, explosive—respond to one who did not give the impression of strength, courage, and manliness?

Another remarkable feature was the wide range of his attraction. The poor, the despised, and the sinners were unrestrained in their response to him. We read of a leper who came beseeching (Matt. 8:2); of a blind beggar who came with outstretched, groping hands, shouting his name (Mark 10:46-51); of a sinning woman whose utter devotion led her



to wash, kiss, and anoint his feet (Luke 7:36-38); and of another who fought her way through the crowd that thronged around him that she might touch the hem of his robe (Matt. 9:20-21). Further, he was most attractive to children. They came fearlessly to his embrace (Mark 10:13) and answered freely to his call (Matt. 18:2). In all this there is no hint of affectation or playing a part. He was simple, natural, and straightforward. The beauty, love, and strength of his inner life found expression in his outer form and manner.

### *His Voice*

The preaching of Jesus had a dimension that cannot be transmitted to us by the printed page. Without the knowledge of his voice we cannot reconstruct his preaching in our imagination—the characteristic turn of phrase, the suggestive inflection, the nuance of this word, the rhythm of that phrase. It may be possible from our understanding of human nature, our thorough study of the Synoptics, and our imagination to sketch a picture of him, but however true this may be, we cannot reconstruct his preaching. We may read his words and study the ideas he imparted through them, but the voice, the essential factor, is missing. Tone tells, not words only. The synoptists tell us that there was authority in his voice, a dignity in his bearing, and, inferentially, a trueness about his life which gave sanction to his words; but they say nothing directly about the quality of his voice, which was after all the true index of his soul. What color is to a painting, in all the fineness of light and shade which reveals a master, quality is to the voice.

Yet Jesus must have had a good speaking voice. It was an essential part of his equipment, and during the years of preparation he must have learned how to use it. For one man to whom public speaking comes naturally, dozens succeed in the art only after long practice and disciplined study. It is in-

deed strange that while no man expects to become a first-rate actor or singer without rigorous training, there seem to be many who fancy that no effort need be expended upon learning how to preach. They take much thought about what they are to say, but no thought about how to say it. While the truth to be communicated may be vital, the instrument of its communication in preaching is equally important. Because he has neglected to master living language and has disregarded voice production, many a profound thinker has failed to communicate truth to men in preaching. If, as Keats says, truth is beauty, it merits all the beauty of voice tones that human speech can bestow upon it.

According to speech experts there are five essential qualities which a preacher should strive to acquire in his speaking voice. In order of increasing importance they are audibility, normality, ease, interestingness, and expressiveness. Without a phonograph record of our Lord's voice an accurate estimate of its qualities is impossible, but the records do contain some significant hints and not a little implicit evidence. We shall consider these hints and examine what evidence the Synoptics contain under the heading of these five essential qualities.

### *Audibility*

Jesus was undoubtedly heard. He had a strong carrying voice; otherwise he would not have spoken so freely in the open air. Only a man who had a strong, clear voice would choose a boat for a pulpit and the seashore for an auditorium (Mark 4:1). It was a common practice for Jesus to speak to "multitudes" in the open countryside, on a hill, or by the seashore, and it would have been more difficult for him to be heard under such conditions than in a building. Yet he must have been heard, or the people would have lost interest. That he attained this audibility means that his utterances were clear and deliberate, that he had determined through constant



practice the cast of head, the focus of tone, the pitch of voice that would give the greatest projection. So developed were his vocal powers that even in the hour of his death he was able to cry in a loud voice: "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" And although he spoke in a loud voice his articulation was unimpaired, for the people heard and remembered.

### *Normality*

We are told that he spoke "not as the scribes," and that on occasions people "wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth." Although we cannot say that his voice was free from mannerisms, idiosyncrasies, or recurrent traits that called attention to themselves, the writers make no observations regarding them. Their silence is significant in that they did observe his facial expressions (Mark 10:21), his eyes (Luke 22:54-62; 19:41), and his characteristic gestures (Mark 1:41; Luke 4:40; 24:32). More positively we can affirm that there was nothing artificial about him, that whether he spoke to crowds or to individuals he was consistently natural and always recognizable. Could he despise the play acting of the Pharisees and himself indulge in vocal histrionics? No, he was too vital to possess a drowsy drone, too wholesome to have a holy accent, too appreciative of life to speak funereal-ly, and too big to cultivate an affectation.

### *Ease*

The sheer quantity of speaking demanded of him must have put a heavy strain upon his voice and energies, yet without apparent distress he was able to continue. It follows that he spoke easily and naturally, that he never forced his register beyond its natural limits, that he produced his voice properly, and that he exercised correct breath control. Most important, he knew how to relax. We are told that on one occasion when the disciples had sent the multitudes away he went on

board a boat and was quickly asleep in spite of the storm (Mark 4:36-38).

### *Interestingness*

The drug that kills most congregations when they are forced to take it in large quantities is monotony—monotony of theme, monotony of thought, monotony of voice. Of the three ingredients, monotony of voice is perhaps the deadliest. A preacher's theme may be new and his thought fresh, but if his voice is monotonous his congregation will become bored or somnolent. Usually, however, a preacher's voice is monotonous because his material is monotonous. All his sentences are the same length; all his ideas are of the same temper; and all his emotions are of the same quality. If there is variety in his matter, freshness in his ideas, and passion in his heart, the chances are that there will be variety in his tones. If evidence of this nature is admitted, we may judge that our Lord's voice did contain this quality of interestingness. His words were vivid, his ideas challenging, and his thoughts stimulating. He spoke the quaint vernacular of the common people; he told the old news in a new way; he had a deep understanding of inner meanings; and he was able to show new meanings in the very oldest things. He had the power to revive half-dead wisdom and to bestow upon it everlasting life, and at his touch the unvalued truth was transformed into a word of life.

### *Expressiveness*

This quality is closely associated with interestingness. The possession of the one would seem to suggest the possession of the other. Both are urgently needed by the preacher. Consider the range of ideas and emotions that may seek expression through his voice in a single service: praise, exaltation, confession, petition, comfort, hope, encouragement, challenge,



and indignation. Is any other man ever called upon to give expression to such a span of human emotion? But the voice is equal to the task. A preacher can touch all the strings with it, for it has endless tone, endless variety, and countless stops. If a preacher aspires to efficiency in this aspect of his work, he must really share and live these emotions and experiences with his people. Only thus can he become for them the very voice that utters their inmost burden and anxiety, their aspiration and joy.

Do we need a record of our Lord's voice to hear his expression as he uttered the following, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me"? (Matt. 11:28-30.) Can we not hear his tones as he proclaims aloud in the market place, with such total contempt of the respectabilities, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites"? (Matt. 23:13.) He wept, we are told, when he beheld the city. As we read his lament over it can we not feel the passion and the tears? "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" (Luke 13:34.) Could he have said that dry-eyed and without emotion in his voice?

There is a tender and moving scene recorded in the Fourth Gospel (20:1-18) which we would like to think was founded on fact not merely because it supports our contention but because it is so wonderfully appealing. A weeping and broken-hearted woman is standing at the empty tomb of Jesus, and she is saying to one whom she has mistaken for the gardener: "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." And he whom she supposes to be the gardener answers her in a word—"Mary." Many had called her by that name before, but only one could say it in just that way. Recognition was instantaneous, and

she turned with a glad cry and would have embraced him but for his warning.

With adequate training and continued striving most men may become preachers. Some, including Paul, have overcome physical defects of presence and speech. No man need despair because his gifts are few. Practice and persistence, as Demosthenes proved, are wonder-workers. But when God especially means a man to be a great preacher with a message for the age, he equips him for it. He endows him with physique, a fine head, good lips, and a voice. These gifts and endowments, however, must be consecrated and brought to their highest pitch of efficiency by thorough preparation. All this is clearly exemplified in the spiritual, mental, and physical preparation of Jesus.



## 3

## His Use of Language

FOUR LANGUAGES WERE SPOKEN IN PALESTINE IN THE DAYS OF Jesus: Latin, the official language of the Roman army of occupation; Greek, the lingua franca of the Greco-Roman world, the language of the official administration and of international commerce; rabbinic Hebrew, the language of the scribal colleges and of the learned Jews; and Aramaic, the language of the common people. During the Persian period Aramaic attained a predominance in western Asia. With dialectal differences, it came to be the *lingua communis* from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. By the time of Alexander the Great it had superseded Hebrew as the living tongue of Palestine. The transition involved no great linguistic revolution, as it was simply a transition from one Semitic language to another, and that a closely cognate one. Hebrew, however, still remained the language of sacred literature.

The Greek conquest and the Hellenizing policy of successive rulers caused fresh linguistic disturbances. Greek entered into competition with Aramaic. Among the cultured and aristocratic classes in Judea, Hellenism made progress, but this was arrested when Antiochus Epiphanes brutally attempted to eradicate Jewish nationalism and religion. His policy aroused an anti-Hellenistic feeling throughout the land, which led to a desperate and successful revolt. Under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus the Jews succeeded in shaking off the foreign yoke, and throughout the Maccabean regime Hellenism was held in check. From the Roman conquest till the days of Jesus it again exerted its influence on Jewish life. Herod the Great affected Greek culture and thus

helped to remove the prejudice against it. In common with the rest of the Roman world the Jews of Palestine came to understand the Greek language, and in cosmopolitan districts such as Galilee they became bilingual, speaking both Aramaic and Greek.

The question that has engaged the minds of the scholars is, Which of these languages did Jesus speak? Or, if he knew and spoke both, which of them did he mainly, if not exclusively, employ as the vehicle of his message? Largely because of the work of George Dalman,<sup>1</sup> we may confidently say that while evidence would suggest that Jesus had a knowledge of Greek, there is no good reason to suppose that he used it freely when delivering his message. It is probable that he used it at his trial before Pilate, but less probable in his conversation with the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). Aramaic was the language that came most naturally to his tongue, and it was the language of his prayers, his preaching, and conversation.

### HIS DICTION

Preaching demands efficiency in the use of language. The greater the preaching the higher the efficiency in the choice of words. Words are sacred things, hallowed by a long past, and they are not to be enterprised, or taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, but reverently, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of truth. What is a word? Broadly defined, a word is any expression of thought that connects one mind with another and thereby transfers an idea. Two conditions are necessary: the word must be full enough to interpret adequately the idea, and it must be simple enough to be understood. In both the receiving and the communicating of his truth the preacher is dependent upon words. Having a due sense of

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus-Jeshua*.



the seriousness and responsibility of the commission laid upon him, the preacher will strive to receive his message with complete understanding and to interpret accurately to his people that which God has laid upon his heart and mind. A preacher owes it to God, to his high calling, and to himself to think truly; and he thinks truly only when he takes care to clarify his mind. The more accurately he selects the precise word, the clearer becomes his thought. But more than this, the use of words in preaching is a social act, and a preacher owes it to his people to give them a true transcript of his mind—a photograph of his thought in clear, simple, concrete words.

If we remember that our versions of the Gospels are translations from the Greek, and that they in turn are translations from the Aramaic in which Jesus spoke, the characteristic features of his diction clearly seen in our versions are indicative of its distinction. Except on those occasions when he met the scribes and Pharisees on their own ground and spoke to them in rabbinic Hebrew (e.g. Mark 7:6-13),<sup>2</sup> he took his words from the vocabulary of the people and selected only those that were simple, concrete, and everyday. What George Bernard Shaw says about Dr. Johnson may be said of Jesus: "His language has so much ease and simplicity that it seems to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation." Invariably, a delicate ease stamps the language of Jesus—a sense of mastery and peace. Those who listened to him marveled at the charm of his words, but they little realized at the time that while they pleased the ear and satisfied the heart, those words also had hooks of steel to cling to mind and memory. It was not without cause that the early Christians

<sup>2</sup> This section contains three quotations from the Old Testament, numerous technical terms, and one word transliterated—*corban*. According to Dalman and T. W. Manson, *corban* is the exact equivalent of the rabbinic word in the Mishnah Nedarim, 1, 2, etc.

used to say, rather wistfully, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus."

### FIGURATIVE SPEECH

The human mind is not a debating hall, but a picture gallery. Around it hang our similes, our concepts. What we hang in the picture galleries of our minds usually determines our outlook and approach to life itself. Who can estimate the power that metaphor has exercised over the civilizations of the past? Who can even attempt to understand the mind and outlook of the great national groups of our modern world without first studying the pictures they have hung in their minds? Metaphor has played and is playing a determining part in human history. It is the essence of religion. It is the living spirit of the Bible. In common with the prophets and psalmists, Jesus was a master of soul-capturing imagery. Though he spoke on the profoundest themes with the profoundest insight, he clothed his thoughts in metaphor, and his picture words and word pictures have hung in men's minds since he uttered them. A preacher whose imagination can supply him with apt and arrestive metaphors gains in effectiveness. What a wealth of effective suggestion for the men of our Lord's day was contained in metaphors such as these: "Ye are the *salt* of the earth, . . . the *light* of the world" (Matt. 5:13-14); "Take my yoke upon you" (11:29); "They are *blind leaders of the blind*" (15:14); "Neither cast ye your pearls *before swine*" (7:6).

Three common metaphors Jesus used were light, salt, leaven. As a specific illustration, consider the parable of the leaven which the woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened (Luke 13:21). This was a most ordinary and commonplace happening belonging to the monotony of domestic routine, yet Jesus saw in it a complete



synopsis of the nature, method, and consummation of the kingdom he had come to declare!

We need to keep in mind that an Oriental language is pictorial. To insist upon taking much of Jesus' teaching just as it reads often means to insist upon taking it as no one listening to him would have understood it. Both his laws and his gospel have suffered many things at the hands of prosaic literalists. They have failed to understand his use of hyperbole. Spirituality and poetry are linked in a most intimate way in his language. Knowing the make-up of the minds to whom he was speaking—a necessary thing for a preacher—he took advantage of their understanding of hyperbolic and epigrammatic speech to communicate his message. For example, the seed of the mustard is not the smallest of all seeds (Matt. 13:32), and it is not necessary for commentators to search for some unheard-of variety of mustard whose seeds are smaller than the spore of ferns to prove Jesus to be correct.

It is sheer pedantry to treat an epigram as a full statement of the truth. Epigrammatic speech is in essence one-sided. The intelligence of the hearer must be trusted to supply the qualifications. Take, for example, this epigrammatic saying: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). This is a forceful expression of the spiritual danger of great wealth. It is deliberately one-sided in order that the greatness of the danger may be realized; to interpret it, however, as an unqualified assertion that the rich may not enter the kingdom of God is to misunderstand the genius of literary expression.

The figurative speech of Jesus was something more than an effective medium of expression—it was the result of his imaginative or poetic capacity. Preachers should find significance in the fact that Jesus was richly endowed with the gift of imagination and made the fullest possible use of it. While we must

reason till reason fails, or till reason itself discovers a power superior to its own, Jesus reminds us that mere reasoning is not the only organ of religious knowledge. To gain a knowledge of God and the world unseen, we need something more than the dialectic handling of theological propositions.

### POETIC FORMS

That Jesus was a careful student of the forms of Hebrew literature the records of his spoken words abundantly prove. Sometimes his style rises in grandeur to the balanced and most poetic prose of the Hebrew prophets (Luke 13:34-36; 19:42-44; 23:28-31). C. F. Burney<sup>3</sup> shows that all the formal elements of Hebrew poetry—parallelism, rhythm, and rhyme—are present in the preaching of Jesus. From many examples we give the following:

#### Synonymous:

There is nothing hid / that shall not be made manifest,  
Nor secret / that shall not come to light. (Mark 4:22.)

#### Antithetic:

There is no good tree / producing / corrupt fruit,  
Nor yet a corrupt tree / producing / good fruit.  
(Luke 6:43; Matt. 7:17, Q.)

#### Synthetic:

I come to cast fire upon the earth;  
And what will I, if it be already kindled? (Luke 12:49.)

To these varieties of parallelism Burney adds a fourth, which he calls "step-parallelism," in which the second line repeats

<sup>3</sup> *The Poetry of Our Lord*, p. 90.



and carries forward to a climax the thought contained in the first:

He that receiveth this child in my name *receiveth me*;  
And he that receiveth me, / receiveth him that sent me.  
(Mark 9:37.)

Retranslations into Aramaic are of course necessary for the detection of rhythm and rhyme, but the scholars assure us that many of the utterances of Jesus are cast in poetic form, that he deliberately chose, on occasions, this medium of expression.

Such evidence is conclusive: Jesus was a preacher whose ear was attuned to the music of words. That men marveled at the charm of his words should not surprise us—most men find a natural delight in rhythm and in rhyme. Jesus knew that words which repeat a certain sound or combination of sounds make music, and he selected them. He knew too that by skillful repetition of words and phrases he could charge a line with feeling. He used music words as well as picture words. Word sounds echoed in his inward ear as their images flashed across his inward eye. He was a master in the technique of his craft. So supremely did he regard the truth he had to communicate to men that he strove to commend it to them in the most effective language he could command. With a deftness found only in great preachers he wove poetic words, sounds, forms into his sermons in such a way as to add richness and beauty, color and feeling to his thought and to set forth his salient ideas in picturesque and unforgettable phrases.

The Hebrew prophets were poets, and in studying their words and forms Jesus enriched his vocabulary, purified his style, and strengthened his sentences. No wonder his sermons were never flat, prosaic, or uninspiring!

What a wealth of culture and color, beauty and joy,

rhythm and rhyme, music and form the poets have to offer the modern preacher! It is said of Alexander Maclaren that he was an exemplary pulpit stylist. He spoke and he wrote poetic prose. His sermons, however, were never overloaded with poetic quotations. There was in them rarely more than a flashing line or an occasional golden phrase of borrowed splendor, but his whole style was quick with the poet's feeling, glowing with imagery, and sparkling with metaphor.

### WORDS OF POWER

Although Jesus did not live in an age noted for its advertising and propaganda, he knew something of the power of words. His master thought was "the perfect fatherhood of God." Linked with the idea of God's sovereignty it was an emotive phrase—a phrase charged with the passion of the prophets, the songs of the psalmists, and the longings of Israel. Linked with the kingship of Yahweh it was the watchword of Israel—magnificent, mighty, imperial. If the master thought of Amos was Yahweh's righteousness; of Socrates, the immortality of the soul; of Buddha, the renunciation of life; of Luther, the freedom of the individual; of Wesley, the witness of the spirit; the master thought of Jesus was God's perfect fatherhood.

For good or ill, dynamic phrases are the most powerful things in the world. They have been the mighty factors in every great movement among men. Islam had its watchword: "God is God, and Mohammed is his prophet." The French Revolution coined: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." Democracy demands: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." And the American War of Independence began with the historic phrase: "No taxation without representation."

Significantly, the great days of the pulpit have always been those when the preacher's message was crystallized in the



form of a slogan. The Church won men to her standard and went forward to victory whenever she defined her aim in simple yet mighty words. What world-shaking and world-transforming power these words once had—"The kingdom of God is at hand"; "Jesus is the Christ"; "Jesus is Lord"; "Justified by faith"—and the word of early Methodism, "Assurance." If the pulpit is merely defending its right to exist or feebly asserting its claim to be believed, is this not because it has failed to coin some challenging and arresting word to say to our age? Is it not because its aim is vague?

It is a mistake, however, for preachers to think—and some do—that by uttering the great words of the past they can challenge or command the present generation. Words, phrases, and forms which once expressed some vital religious experience, and which, when repeated, had the power to move the hearts of men, tend to lose their vitality with constant repetition. The cardinal principles of Jesus were never meant to be cast into a rigid and unalterable phraseology. Categories of thought change with changing years; and words, phrases, and forms gather different meanings from generation to generation. Fundamentally unalterable as the principles of Jesus are, they vary in application from age to age. Preaching needs continually to be vitalized not only with living words but with fresh forms. Stock words, phrases, and forms have their uses, but before the preacher uses them he needs to be sure that they still contain meanings that are fully understood. The danger of the stereotype from a preacher's point of view is that it may become a substitute for thought. It may be used without the hearer's, or even the preacher's, making any attempt to translate it into something real. Stereotypes, no matter how hoary they are with age or sanctified by tradition or venerated by orthodoxy, are poor substitutes for the living truth that ought to burn and blaze in every preacher's heart. Unctuous ecclesiastics who unthinkingly mouth devitalized words,

phrases, and forms cut no ice today. The only way to challenge the minds and move the hearts of men is for the preacher to speak out of a fresh and vital experience of God and, like our Lord, to find the precise word, the revealing phrase, and the new and glowing formulation that states essential things to the intellectual and spiritual acceptance of the modern mind.

### WORDS OF LIFE

Fundamentally the power of a word is in what it says, in its content. It is by this acid test alone that the words of Jesus may be judged. They have survived because of the wealth of their content. He was not unaware of the lasting quality of the words he uttered—"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). He knew, too, that some men confused the hollow echo of emptiness with the thunder of power, and he warned his followers of the emptiness of words. "When you pray," he said, "do not gabble without thinking,<sup>4</sup> as the pagans do, for they think that by using many words they will be heard." (Matt. 6:7.) Obviously, he had little patience with those who resorted to the occult manipulation of words in verbal ecstasies in the synagogue and at the corners of the open squares (Matt. 6:5).

We live in an age when the very air, in even a literal sense, is corrupted by advertising methods and political pap. Advertising and politics, in their anxiety to get results or votes, are quite ready to appeal to self-interest, ingrained prejudices, class consciousness, and credulity. The situation thus created is a difficult one, and some preachers feel that they cannot compete; but if they do and attempt to oversell religion by promising benefits that cannot be realized, their failure will be measured by their people's disillusionment. Too many sects

<sup>4</sup> βατταλογήσητε.



and cults are enjoying a booming prosperity on the issue of checks in God's name which are not in his character or purpose to honor. Inflation in the pulpit is as dangerous as inflation in a nation's currency. While a preacher may learn much from the modern agents of publicity, he should ever remember that he is a preacher and not a supersalesman. His gospel is not for sale; it is free, not cheap.

Modern jargon and slang have also contributed to the inflation and deflation of the verbal coinage. If, as we have seen, the use of jargon in preaching tends to make it dull, trite, and out of touch with the actualities of modern life, the use of a debased verbal currency will cause it to become oblique, compromising, and lacking many fine ethical and spiritual discriminations. Though slang is preferable to jargon and may, on occasions, be most effective, it is not desirable to introduce crude and uncouth words into the pulpit. Pure, simple English is understood and appreciated by both the educated and the ignorant.

Thus while some words are not worth stooping to pick up, others are windows to eternal things. The discovery of certain words—"Father," "Son," "Servant of Yahweh," "Son of man"—put meaning into our Lord's life. They ran a purpose through it, surrounded it with far horizons, and directed its activities. Other men who have accomplished anything worth while have been possessed by some all-mastering word. Say Simpson and we think chloroform; say Lister and we think antiseptics; say Marconi and we think wireless. The name of Newton can never be separated from gravitation, nor Einstein from relativity. Marx and communism, Calvin and predestination, Livingstone and Africa, Paul and Christ are forever joined together.

Words of life await utterance from those preachers by whom they have been discovered and experienced. By many signs the

people are eager to hear words that will put meaning into their lives and purpose into their living.

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? . . . and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring good tidings of good things! (Rom. 10:14-15.)



## 4

# *Preaching in Pictures*

CLOSELY ALLIED TO JESUS' PICTURE WORDS ARE HIS WORD pictures, and both witness to his method and the fashion of his mind. Three inseparable mental characteristics were interwoven in the fabric of our Lord's mind: his thoughts were always concrete, not abstract; his intellectual processes were intuitive, not argumentative; his views were ever positive, never negative. His mind was not the kind that constructed creeds, argued fine points, and logically proved, or syllogistically disposed. He was not a speculative thinker. He taught his deepest truths and discussed life's greatest problems in terms of the homeliest things. Word pictures enabled him to put the truth he desired to stress into concrete rather than abstract form. He dealt with one fact or person by itself or himself. Seizing upon the real problem in a man's life, he dealt with that; he did not theorize, generalize, or speculate. He looked at each particular fact as it was in relation to itself, in relation to the whole, in the light of the highest and widest principles, and according to human need.

As with his diction, his word pictures were simple, concrete, vivid, and memorable. Almost every method of the illustrative and pictorial handling of truth is to be found in his preaching. Skilled in word magic, he could paint an unforgettable picture in the fewest possible words. He had an instinct for the essential elements in a situation. His stories impressed his contemporaries; and they, as the Old Testament bears witness, were no mean judges of the storyteller's art. Any method, in fact, that would enable him to put his truth into concrete

rather than abstract form he enlisted to his service. He took pains to be understood.

### MEANING OF PARABLE

The word "parable" <sup>1</sup> means literally "a placing beside," and in classical rhetoric it refers to juxtaposition, setting one thing by the side of another for the purpose of comparison and illustration. It is the argument from analogy, the taking of analogous cases. The cases, though not historical, are always probable and correspond with what actually occurs in real life. From this aspect the parable must be crystal clear—it must illustrate. It ought always to be more readily intelligible than that which it is intended to illustrate. Among the intelligentsia or in learned discussion it may be regarded as "a crutch for limping intellects," a simple rhetorical device by which minds incapable of sustained thought may be led to conclusions which can otherwise be reached only as the result of elaborate trains of reasoning. But this half-patronizing attitude is entirely out of place in preaching—as out of place, in fact, as the cold, profound, academic, aloof mind is out of place in the pulpit.

The aim of the preacher is to seek and to save, to win and to enlighten, and to him the pictorial method is an art to be cultivated. His illustrations ought to be both explicative and stimulative. As a teacher of geometry uses diagrams, and the lecturer in architecture displays his drawings, so the preacher uses his parables or illustrations. They make clear his message and bring it within the comprehension of all; they challenge men's curiosity and provoke thought, for the mind of man is so constituted that it is awakened and quickened by pictures. Some of our Lord's parables fall within this classification. The good Samaritan, for example, is a parable that can be taken as a concrete example meant to illuminate a general principle.

<sup>1</sup> παραβολή, from παρά (beside) and βάλλω (throw or cast).



Then there are those in which an analogy is drawn from human affairs to indicate heavenly conditions. The parable of the lost sheep is an example.

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) "parable" is frequently, though not uniformly, used to translate the Hebrew *māshāl*.<sup>2</sup> An examination of the Old Testament makes it evident that the writers employed *māshāl* to cover a wide range of meanings: allegory, similitude, proverb, paradox, riddle, and parable. There are only a few really similar to the parables we find in the Gospels. Our Lord's parables stand as a type, and it is convenient to attach a technical sense to the word as describing this special type. In common with the few in the Old Testament the gospel parables are significant in two ways: (1) The story is natural and self-sufficient as a story, yet (2) it is seen to point to a deeper spiritual meaning or to a further meaning by application to persons or events or both. Hence T. W. Manson describes this type of parable, which we take over from the Old Testament to the Gospels, as

a literary creation in narrative form designed either to portray a type of character for warning or example or to embody a principle of God's governance of the world and men. It may partake of both natures. In logical terminology it might almost be called a concrete universal.<sup>3</sup>

We may almost define the parables of Jesus as sermons in story form. They are certainly words of God, and they embody the spiritual insight and the religious experience of Jesus. God's truth is communicated to men, and Jesus' personality is bound up with them.

Our Lord told his parables for the same reason that all true preachers preach sermons. He was concerned to show, directly or indirectly, what God is and what man may become, and to

<sup>2</sup> מִשָּׁל.

<sup>3</sup> *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 63.

show these things in a way that would produce repentance and faith. His parables, like sermons of the highest type, called for a transformed life, both of individuals and society—a life hidden in God, a life with the qualities of the kingdom stamped upon it. His object was not merely to give religious instruction in an interesting and attractive form but to produce religious faith in his listeners. His purpose was not to make God probable to men but to make him real. He took human experience at its highest levels and made this the departure point for the adventure of faith.

We may say that the main purpose of Jesus' parables was to enshrine and enforce the truths of his gospel. They are a vital part of his revelation of the divine will and of human duty. Like that of every true preacher, his purpose was to work through the imagination and the understanding of his hearers in order to convict men of their sin and to convert them to God. His parables were, as we have seen, vivid, interesting, and arrestive as stories. Many listeners were probably charmed with the surface meaning and found pleasure in listening to them, but the deeper meaning was there for those who had eyes to see and ears to hear. Jesus was not unmindful of those whose grasp was limited, but who were anxious to learn. He adapted his methods to their gradually expanding intelligence: "And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were anxious to hear it" (Mark 4:33).

#### SOURCES OF HIS ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL

The little town of Mosgiel, a few miles south of Dunedin in the South Island of New Zealand, is not particularly impressive or distinctive. There is very little to distinguish it from a hundred other such towns in New Zealand; yet for the reader of F. W. Boreham's sermons and essays the town, its streets and houses, its characters and personalities, its natural features and



landmarks, and its surrounding villages and countryside are symbols of spiritual life. No reader can visit "the Boreham country," as it is now called, without being reminded of the spiritual truths Boreham has associated with many commonplace features and characteristics. Jesus possessed this same gift to a unique extent. No one who listened to him preach could go through a single day of average experience without being reminded of the spiritual meanings he had associated with homely scenes and commonplace incidents. Who among those who listened to the parable of the sower could see thereafter a sower at work without being reminded of the truths enshrined in the parable? In transforming the things of common life into media of spiritual truth, and in filling each common day with perpetual reminders of eternal realities, he proved himself a preacher of the highest order.

There is scarcely a department of contemporary life not mentioned in his preaching. He was alert to, and aware of, everything going on about him. His references cover a wide range—home and domestic life; pastoral and agricultural pursuits; trades, business, and commerce; civil and national affairs; social, religious, and national customs.

### *Natural Phenomena and History*

If we remember that our records are but fragments, the number of similes, metaphors, and illustrations drawn from nature suggests that her impact upon Jesus was remarkable. There is scarcely a field of common observation in this realm that he does not enlist in his service. On almost every page of our records there is some reference to bird, beast, flower, or some of nature's sights and wonders. Among his illustrations we find references to the march of the seasons (Matt. 24:20; Mark 13:28), to the varying response of the different kinds of soil (Mark 4:4-8), to the mystery of development, and to the habits and dispositions of animals and birds (Matt 10:16; Luke 9:58).

To Jesus nature was a revelation of the Father God—his character and purposes. In sun and rain he saw God's character of universal love. Irrespective of the merits or demerits of the recipients, God's bountifulness was unfailing: "For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). In bird creation he saw many illustrations of God's never-failing care: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matt. 6:26). Even in the lifeless form of a fallen sparrow he saw an illustration of God's all-embracing providence. There was no "problem of suffering" in his view of the natural world; his trust in God's goodness enabled him to contemplate suffering in nature with a calmness that is surprising. So firmly centered was his mind in the idea of God's care and good will toward the meanest of his creatures that when he wanted to teach men to trust in God, he pointed to the common things of the natural world, saying that if only men would consider the lilies, watch the sparrows, and study the heavens, they would find their faith in God strengthened.

Jesus looked out upon the natural order, not through the eyes of a scientist or of a philosopher, but with the love of an artist and the insight of a spiritual teacher. Thus he nowhere enunciates a theory of creation or contributes any new discovery to the scientific knowledge of his day or ours. His preaching contains no attempt to construct a synthesis of the observed facts of the physical world or anything that even remotely suggests an analysis of the methods and principles of scientific inquiry. The blunt fact is that Jesus was neither a scientist nor a philosopher—he was a preacher. His knowledge was limited to that of a Palestinian Jew of the first century. His interest was a preacher's interest. It is significant that in nearly all his references human need is either the subject or the object of his



concern. Nature's facts and laws were analogous to spiritual facts and laws. The cold, impersonal attitude of the scientist in observing natural phenomena was foreign to him. Nature interested him as the creation of God, or as the scene of his providential care of his creatures, or as the stage of human life. This, pre-eminently, is the preacher's outlook.

### *Old Testament*

Jesus found the Old Testament an inexhaustible treasury of illustrative material. He was able to take some vivid word or some significant incident from the ancient literature of his race and make it into a living message for the people of his day. He was the first preacher to recognize the sermonic wealth in the Old Testament.

Studying the Bible, as every preacher should know, is only another way of studying life itself, and always in its spiritual relations. It is eternally contemporary. The same essential conditions appear and reappear in the history of man. Human nature is the same everywhere. Men conform to type, and the ages vary the types but slightly. Men of the Old Testament reappear in the New Testament, and men of the New Testament walk our modern streets. Though the people of the Bible may speak in a different tongue, costume themselves in other fashions, and think the thoughts of another age, in their essential characteristics they differ in no respect from men of today. The preacher who knows his Bible as Jesus knew his Old Testament, and who has taken pains to understand contemporary life, will find that most of the situations he meets are paralleled in the Bible. In this way he is able to lift the timely up into the timeless, the temporary into the eternal. And this, precisely, is his task. When the preacher understands the Bible theologically, spiritually, and psychologically, it becomes vibrant with meaning, a gold mine of insights, principles, and illustrations. It was thus that Jesus understood the Old Testament.

*Human Life*

The illustrations of Jesus reveal his profound knowledge of human nature and his unfailing insight into character and disposition. We can readily credit John's estimate that he "knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (2:24-25). One great, indispensable quality of Jesus' preaching was his insight into life, not simply knowledge of the facts of life, but insight into the nature of life. He knew human nature in its littleness and its greatness, its pettiness and its sublimity, its comedy and tragedy, its trials and delights, its passions and its ambitions—proof of this is found in his parables. He found people infinitely interesting, and from the experiences of childhood and motherhood, youth and old age, pleasure and pain, defeat and triumph, he gathered the materials for his preaching. He found the resources for ministering to life in life, and that is one reason why his sermon parables are so illuminating and compelling. Good preaching reflects real life. It is based on a sympathetic understanding of the thoughts and lives of those who listen.

Evidence of our Lord's understanding of men is seen, first, in his accurate portrayal of them in his parables. We still can see and recognize them as they lived in his memory: the drunken servant (Matt. 24:45-51); the churlish neighbor (Luke 11:5-8); the loving father and his two sons, the one willful and foolish and the other self-righteous and sullen (15:11-32); the rich fool who stored up wealth and was just settling down to enjoy himself, when he died (12:13-21); the smug scribe dressed in flowing robes, inviting admiration as he stood preening himself in the market place (Mark 12:38-40). And second, the evidence is seen in his dealings with men and the success of his approach to them. It is generally easier for a preacher to speak to a large congregation than it is to a handful of people. There is a certain inspiration in numbers. The sight of an eager crowded audience draws the very best out of a preacher. He is



an unusual man indeed who can ignore the depressing influence of scanty numbers. Yet, because of the priceless value Jesus placed on the individual human soul and his adaptability, he could preach effectively to a congregation of one. He set an absolute value on the individual, and he gave his whole mind to the man or the woman before him. So profound were his knowledge of human nature and his understanding of personal, domestic, and social problems that in a true sense he "knew all the answers." Not only did he know where the man or the woman was, and how he or she got there, but he also knew the way out. He was able to furnish men and women with a definite, understandable, guaranteed technique for the spiritual life. He gave them specific suggestions, specific handles they could grasp to lift themselves to where they ought to be.

Though he spoke to crowds, had a popular appeal, and evidently knew the psychology of men in a crowd, he distrusted mob emotion and never practiced, as far as we know, mass evangelism. Among the individual men and women with whom Jesus had dealings there was not one in whom he was mistaken, no, not even Judas. He summed up the cynical, self-righteous Simon as easily and as accurately as he did the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7:36-50). Peter he knew better than Peter knew himself (Matt. 26:33-35), and his quick understanding of Zacchaeus transformed the hard, money-grabbing publican into a philanthropist (Luke 19:1-9). In the wealthy, despised man "sitting at the receipt of custom" Jesus saw an eager heart ready for a new way of life; and in the Pharisee, praying at the corner of the street where all men could see him, he saw a man in whose life God was a stranger. John supports the Synoptics here, for according to his record Jesus dealt with the perplexed, academic Nicodemus as effectively as he did with the frivolous, would-be bantering woman of Samaria.

## DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

No one can read our Lord's parables and the narrative portions of his discourses without sensing their dramatic elements. It is these elements that give the stories such wonderful life and movement. Because drama often signifies acting and artificial situations, we must not mistake theatrical elements for dramatic elements. Jesus was neither a playwright nor an actor. Although he had a liking for dramatic situations (Mark 5:30; 10:15; 12:41-44; etc.) he did not play a showman's part or adopt sensational methods to attract attention or enforce his truth. His parables and utterances are dramatic because they portray life sympathetically, interestingly, and realistically. Drama is life, life in all its aspects, life as it is. Jesus portrayed life. Consider the dramatic force, art, and appeal in the parable of the good Samaritan or of the prodigal son. If the modern pulpit has fallen on dreary days, is it not because preachers have to a degree lost their sense of the dramatic in the message they have to proclaim?

The modern preacher has long recognized that he faces a "motion-picture mind," but sometimes he forgets that it is a realistic mind too. It is a mind with little interest in profound abstractions, conventional sermonic patter, or colorful nothings. In preaching, drama is the truth of things, and the closer a preacher gets to truth the more dramatic and realistic is his preaching. Jesus had the insight to pierce through the coverings of things and persons and to reveal to men the dramatic heart of reality which they instinctively recognized as true.

Religion and life are not separate facts. They cover the same range of experience. Christianity is just a particular way of looking at life and dealing with it. It is as real as life is real; it is as dramatic as life is dramatic. To preach the Christian religion naturally is to preach it realistically and dramatically. It ought to be as illuminating, exciting, thrilling, and compel-



ling in its presentation as the newspapers, the movies, and the radio strive to be. However, instead of appealing to man's usual wants, desires, appetites on a low level and "giving the public what it wants," it ought to appeal to man's essential needs, desires, and aspirations on the highest level, calling, nay, challenging him to become what he might be.

### OBJECT LESSONS

Jesus was not unaware of the value of "visual aids" in preaching. In certain cases he employed definite acts for the sole purpose of illustrating his points. An example is found in Mark 9:33-37, where it is recorded that he took a child in his arms and showed how such an act might be invested with deep spiritual significance. He set a little child "in the midst" of his disciples for the same purpose (Matt. 18:2). He preached an effective sermon in the upper room, according to John, when he combined exemplification by action with exemplification by word (13:2-16). Closely related to these instances are the numerous cases where he performed acts of healing or kindness and drew a vivid lesson or pointed an important truth.

His supreme object lesson, of course, was himself. His whole life was a vivid and complete embodiment of his preaching. The most telling sermon a preacher proclaims is the sermon he lives. His calling consists in being something; and it does not consist in anything else, although it may be manifested in other things. His life ought to exemplify the truth he proclaims. By displaying his credentials in his life, he crowns his pulpit with authority. Yet it is also true—and in fairness it must be stated—that a preacher may fail to practice all he preaches without being unfaithful to his high calling. The essential thing is the direction and the quality of his life. In striving after the highest life, in trying earnestly to approximate it, though he may not hope to incarnate it fully, he sets before his people a true example.

## 5

### *Two Distinct Types*

AN EFFECTIVE PREACHER IS ABLE TO ADAPT HIMSELF TO HIS congregation. Congregations differ vastly from one another. As they differ in size, so they differ in quality. Some are quick, others slow; some are alert, others stolid; some are keen, and others depressingly unresponsive. The size, the quality, the temper, and the spirit of a congregation determine a preacher's approach to it and the method and content of his preaching. Gladstone used to say that he got from his audience in the shape of mist what he gave to them in the shape of rain. Jesus was able to sense his congregation and to adapt his preaching to it. The synoptic record reveals that Jesus did not preach to all and sundry alike, but that he changed his method and type according to his hearers. Those New Testament scholars who have made a special study of our Lord's teaching claim that he had one way of dealing with the scribes and Pharisees, another for the multitude, and yet another for his intimate disciples. T. W. Manson says, "We can go further and find in the Synoptic record not merely three strains of teaching but three manners of address or teaching methods, determined by the personal relation between the teacher and audience."<sup>1</sup> We shall find that even within these three broad classifications there were other adaptations of method and content according to the particular congregation that confronted him. And although his preaching was not classified according to our understanding of the different types of preaching, we can recognize two distinct types—expository and evangelical.

<sup>1</sup> *The Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 17-18.



## EXPOSITORY

From Mark's outline of our Lord's ministry it appears that Jesus began his mission with an appeal to the religious, synagogue-going people. He says that Jesus preached in the synagogues "throughout all Galilee" (1:39). There is a suggestion of an organized preaching itinerary in the reason he gave for leaving Capernaum: "He said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: *for therefore came I forth*" (1:38).

We can infer from the scattered hints in the gospel record that Jesus' synagogue preaching was concerned mainly with the proclamation of the coming kingdom of God (Matt. 4:23). Yet this announcement was not uttered without its implications being stated and its scriptural authority quoted. Cogent reasons for repentance and for belief in this "good news" must have been advanced. Still further, in conformity with established custom of synagogue preaching in the New Testament period, Jesus' preaching must have been cast in the form of an exposition, and from the fact that he preached while sitting down (Luke 4:20; Matt. 5:1; 26:55) it can also be inferred that his exposition was didactic rather than rhetorical.

The comments his preaching called forth suggest that it was marked by authority (Mark 1:22) and novelty (1:27) and was received by the members of the Galilean congregations with some degree of favor (1:28). Some scholars of the form-criticism school regard two of these passages (1:22, 27) as representing Mark's peculiar emphasis. William Manson states that for Mark the teaching of Jesus is essentially a sign, a messianic phenomenon:

Thus at the first mention of his teaching Mark stresses as its fundamental characteristic the fact that it was "with authority" and that it astonished his hearers. "They were amazed at his doctrine" is his phrase (1:21), strange language for one to use who was think-

ing of the pure reasonableness or self-evidencing truth of the words and acts of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Even if we agree with the form critics that for Mark the words and acts of Jesus were messianic phenomena, must we read this emphasis into every saying and incident? Why should it be thought "strange language for one to use who was thinking of the pure reasonableness or self-evidencing truth of the words and acts of Jesus"? Could it not be because of the pure reasonableness or self-evidencing truth of his words that the people were amazed and astonished? If writers of the form-critical school, for instance, were consistently guided by the pure reasonableness or the self-evidencing truth of the passages they interpret, would it not be an occasion for the average student to be amazed and astonished? Therefore, we shall regard the passages (Mark 1:22, 27) with Luke 4:22—"And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth"—as being indicative of the power, freshness, and charm of Jesus' expositions. From what we know, the synagogue congregations were not always accustomed to expositions of this type. They were accustomed rather to hear passages read from the Law or the Prophets by scribal experts who usually quoted what Rabbi "This" had said regarding Rabbi "That's" opinion concerning them. So familiar were these explanations that they no longer held the people's attention. When expository preaching lacks the insight of the seer and the passion of the prophet and becomes merely a running commentary of shallow nothings piously articulated, worship loses its beauty and religion its soul. No wonder many people had gained the impression that all God demanded of them was to fast on certain days, to observe the Sabbath, to attend the temple at Jerusalem on special occasions, and to take care of all the pettifogging details in cooking, washing, and eating.

<sup>2</sup> *Jesus the Messiah*, p. 35.



Expository preaching is perhaps the most difficult of a preacher's work. Often it seems the easiest and is adopted as a labor-saving device, consequently degenerating into a string of comments and half-digested opinions. Jesus brought to his expository preaching a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, a deep spiritual understanding, a clear insight into the things of God, a grasp of essential meanings, and the ability to draw out the core of the passage and to display it significantly and convincingly. All these qualities are as necessary to expository preaching as expository preaching is necessary today.

#### EVANGELICAL

Our Lord's first demand was that man should get right with God, and in this he was the spiritual successor of the great eighth-century prophets, who insisted that sacrificial and ceremonial acts were not acceptable to Yahweh when the heart of man was evil. His demand for repentance was a demand for a change in a man's life that went deeper than regret, however sincere, for particular acts of wrongdoing. It meant a complete turning of a man's life toward God in filial love and obedience. It was what we understand by conversion—a spiritual experience in which man realized his divine sonship, acknowledged one supreme loyalty, and turned his love upward toward God and outward toward his fellows. This was fundamental to all his preaching, and we shall never understand its many aspects until we recognize it.

The publicans and the sinners—the socially ostracized—were the two classes or social groups which especially attracted Jesus. They aroused his compassion and stimulated his efforts to reach them. He scandalized the scribes and Pharisees by his willingness to associate in table fellowship with these classes (Luke 5:27-32), and in answer to their criticism he replied: "They that are whole need not a physician; but they

that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." And in this we have his conception of God's mercy and generosity for the undeserving and the reason for his evangelical message and appeal to them. It was of them, for instance, he told the matchless stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15). Just as, in the Old Testament, Yahweh's soul was impatient over the misery of Israel (Judg. 10:16), so for Jesus there was joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15:7), which clearly implies the Father's sorrow over the unrepentant sinner. In the prodigal's father, who "was moved with compassion" at the sight of his returning son, we have an unmistakable picture of the Father's attitude to the penitent. But even more than this, the shepherd's search for the straying sheep and the woman's anxious efforts to find the lost coin represent the Father as actually going forth in the effort to reclaim those that are lost even while they are still impenitent.

This, of course, is the heart of all evangelical preaching. This representation of God is the original contribution of Jesus to religion. To some extent it was anticipated in the Old Testament—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7)—but the new and striking element in the picture of God's character was revealed by Jesus alone. Paul preached it as "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24); theologians have systematized it in their doctrine of grace; and preachers of all ages have expounded it; but no one has succeeded in presenting it with such simplicity and attractiveness as Jesus. He put it in such a way that even a child could understand. He did not talk learnedly, with definitions, distinctions, and qualifications about grace; nor did he use technical, theological, or philosophical words that only students could understand. He



neither embodied it in some "scheme of salvation" nor appealed to metaphysics. He told it all in simple stories, and never has evangelical preaching been so attractive and so transparently clear.

### *Repentance*

It is said with truth that the truest, the most human, and the most tender picture of repentance to be found in the Bible is the parable of the prodigal son. All the essential elements of Jesus' thought concerning repentance are to be found within it. The prodigal realized he was lost;<sup>3</sup> he decided to reverse his way of life; he took a decisive step away from the old way towards the new; and he made his humble confession.

Repentance, according to Jesus, was the change from a self-centered life to a God-centered life. It was the essential qualification for entrance into the kingdom of God. In this sense it meant the submission of men to God as King; but for Jesus, God was not only King, he was Father, and entering his kingdom involved a personal and a filial relation to him. Therefore, Jesus thought not simply of man's submission to God's authority so much as of a personal relationship of confidence and affection between God and man. Thus when he spoke about entering the kingdom of God, he must have thought chiefly of the adoption by the individual of a filial attitude toward God, involving a complete obedience to God's will as set forth in his laws.

### *Sin and Forgiveness*

Jesus was essentially practical, and he cared little about the methods of the scribal schools. He lived close to God—

<sup>3</sup> The English verbs "lose," "perish," "destroy," and their cognates have to be used to translate the various parts of the single Greek verb ἀπόλλυμι and the abstract noun derived from it, ἀπώλεια. The root idea behind these Greek words is the frustration of an owner's purpose.

which means near to the heart of things. He loved life and wanted men to have it more abundantly. His quarrel with sin was not an academic one—it was a human one. Men for ages had been philosophizing about evil and its origin, and they had come to the strangest of conclusions, but Jesus with his deep spiritual insight laid bare the secret source. He declared that we must seek for the mystery of evil in the mystery of personality, in the secret places of the soul (Mark 7:23). He did not define sin nor tell us how it came into the world. He thought of it, not as an abstract entity, but as a personal disposition of the mind; and he referred to it in concrete examples—the play-acting piety of the Pharisees, the riotous living of the prodigal son, and the religious and racial exclusiveness of the priestly class. He thought of it as a condition of the soul, analogous to disease in the body. This is implied in "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous but sinners" (2:17). Just as bodily pain and sickness are symptoms of disease, so the sins of men are symptoms of the condition of their hearts. It was this inward condition he sought to change. In its unchanged state it rendered man unfit for communion with the Father and prevented him from realizing his sonship.

Jesus' outlook on sin and forgiveness was based on his conception of God as a perfect Father who impartially loves all his children, and who seeks to bring them into conscious realization of their sonship. He taught that when the sinner repents of his sin and turns away from it he always receives the Father's forgiveness. "God be merciful to me a sinner," cried one of old; and Jesus said, "He went to his house justified"—right with God (Luke 18:14).

Forgiveness is the restoration of a personal relationship, the conditions of which are moral and spiritual, not speculative and abstract. Jesus did not ask what must be done about an



abstract entity called "sin" before God could show forth his grace; he taught that man must be changed in mind and disposition to God and to his fellows, and then he would receive the ever-offered divine grace.

#### *A Forgotten Emphasis*

Evangelical preachers may proclaim that forgiveness is a free gift of God, but they must not forget that it is neither indiscriminate nor unconditional. The principle of forgiveness may be stated thus: he who would be forgiven must himself forgive. This does not mean, of course, that a man may purchase the forgiveness of God by forgiving his neighbor. It means that the forgiving spirit is an essential condition of his receiving God's forgiveness. The practice of forgiveness is a part of the divine life man is meant to live. We become like the perfect Father only when, like him, metaphorically speaking, we allow our rain to fall on the evil and on the good. We are to forgive as God forgives. And this spirit of forgiveness is the speciality of the brotherly love Jesus wished to instill into the heart of humanity. He emphasized that men had a special relation to those who had injured them, and that it must be theirs to take the initiative in restoring conditions of friendship. The position of the regenerated man was altogether different from that of a bystander: he had a special responsibility laid upon him whenever other men had sinned against him. This was startling morality—that all men had the right to forgiveness. A man might have trampled upon the rights of others, but he had not forfeited his own thereby. He might have repudiated the most sacred obligations, but that did not cancel the obligations of others. How startling this must have been to Peter, who had been brought up under the old Mosaic traditions. The eye-for-an-eye principle—the *lex talionis*—he could understand. He thought he had made a wondrous stretch of magnanimity when he suggested seven as the num-

ber of times of forgiveness, but Jesus staggered him when he said: "Not until seven times, but until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22).

Jesus taught unlimited forgiveness, which, unfortunately, is still an ideal that soars far above us. The ape-and-tiger spirit is not dead, and we have to keep tight rein upon the vindictive impulse. Two sins which Jesus singled out as being very harmful to the divine life in man were the love of money and the unforgiving spirit. It is to be feared that preachers do not put the same emphasis of condemnation upon these sins today. If a man is fond of money, he is often treated respectfully, and some even touch their hats to him. Men have been expelled from church fellowships because they drank to excess, seldom, if ever, because they were avaricious. If a man is known to have the lust for gambling, he is often treated with scant respect; but if it is a rancor in his life, a feud in his circle, the unforgiveness of an enemy, we say, "Oh, well, he is only human after all." Yet if we stay to contemplate, these are the darkest sins of all. Greed and hate lie at the roots of most of the tragedies of our race. Sins of the flesh are often vulgar, but they are not so deeply rooted in life. Sins of the spirit are less ostentatious, but, like couch grass in a garden, they are almost ineradicable. Jesus was tender to the former transgressions, but most fierce with the latter.

While he does not urge his followers to be on good terms with the enemies of the human race, he does command them to be ready to forgive every personal trespass. And these are precisely the trespasses which are so hard to forgive. For a man to lie is undoubtedly wrong; but when he lies about us, there is a keen edge on the knife. All admit that it is wicked to bear false witness; but when a man slanders us, our zeal for the ninth commandment grows in intensity. The moment an offense touches a man's pride, he is full of virtuous indignation. Men will usually forgive a theft, but how few will for-



give a personal slight. We will condone grave social offences; but if a man hurts our pride, we will brood over it indefinitely. Because pride hinders forgiveness, Jesus made such a virtue of humility. He bound up divine forgiveness with human forgiveness. He taught men to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." There is no sterner test of character in the world than that prayer, and it means just what it says: God forgives us, but he demands that we must forgive. It is the only clause in the Lord's Prayer that is accompanied by an explanation—"as we forgive them that trespass against us."

By emphasizing the virtue of forgiveness Jesus focused its ethical quality, and men gained a new and ennobling conception of it. Those seeking forgiveness must possess a forgiving spirit. To forgive thus is proof that we recognize the enormity of our own sins and are truly penitent. It will be noticed that God does not withhold his forgiveness from us if we do not repent and forgive, but our unforgiving spirit makes it impossible for us to experience his forgiveness. So long as there are ill-will and resentment in us, so long are we unfit, unprepared, and wholly unable to experience the forgiveness of God.

## Topical Preaching

ALTHOUGH IT MAY BE ARGUED THAT THE GOSPEL MATERIAL IS altogether too scanty for any adequate conception of our Lord's topical preaching to be presented, we can make the attempt. The main purpose of our study is to examine the preaching of Jesus from every possible aspect so that nothing which may have contributed to his power as a preacher will be omitted. It is possible, of course, that in some instances we may have to make the most of insufficient material; but then, because of the fragmentary character of the records, most synoptic studies confront this difficulty. While we acknowledge that the divisions under which we discuss his topical preaching were not made by the synoptists or, more candidly, were not known to them, let us make them not only for convenience and clarity but also because the gospel material enables us so to do.

### DOCTRINAL

Jesus was not a systematic theologian, nor did he attempt to give his hearers an orderly and a comprehensive exposition of the principles which underlie the experience of man in his relation to the ultimate realities of existence. Jesus' appeal to the intellect was indirect; he attached supreme importance to the spiritual and ethical life. His object was not merely to propound a more acceptable theory of man and his relations to God and the world but to minister to man's spiritual needs. In our eagerness to find in his sermons his doctrinal position, we must not ignore the fact that he attached more importance to the spiritual life than the mere acceptance of true doctrines.



So although we may not expect to find a systematic structure of doctrine in his sermons, we can seek for doctrinal attitudes and viewpoints. If his direct references are comparatively infrequent, his doctrinal assumptions are significant. The things he did not say, in this respect, are worthy of our earnest attention. In other words, his preaching must be put against the background of the Jewish religion. Only in the light of the Old Testament revelation can it be fully understood. There were elements in Judaism that were unique and indispensable as a basis of our Lord's preaching. He was able to assume, for instance, a belief in one living and true God, Maker of heaven and earth and Father of all mankind. Although there was a wide gulf separating Jesus from many of his compatriots on some points, here he was fully at one with them all. On any other basis his preaching would have been meaningless. Could he have proclaimed the fatherhood of God if the people to whom he preached had not accepted without challenge the fact that God was one and not many? Could he have proclaimed the kingdom of God if the sovereignty of God was thought to be divided between a number of deities? It was on the basis of ethical monotheism that Jesus was able to preach. He never had to insist that God was good. This was assumed by both himself and his hearers. True, he pointed to a higher standard of goodness than they had ever endeavored to achieve—he bade them be perfect, as their heavenly Father was perfect—but his conception of religion and theirs were based on the idea of an ethical God.

Like the prophets of Israel, Jesus was no metaphysician. He thought of God as a person, and in that light he interpreted God's attitude to men. Building on the thought of the prophets, he expounded the character of God. While it may be true that God is more than a person, and that personality is only one of many aspects of the divine Being, it was this aspect of God with which Jesus dealt.

From this brief survey there are two things the modern preacher may observe regarding doctrinal preaching. First, without supporting the popular tendency to take out of the Christian religion everything distinctly religious and to call what is left "real Christianity," we may say that the revelation of God in Jesus was not a system of theology but a life. While it is not true to say that "real" or "essential" Christianity, when stripped of its ornamental frillings and its doctrinal incrustations, is to put into practice the Sermon on the Mount, it is true to say that preachers have frequently demanded of men assent to theological propositions while acquiescing far too supinely in moral inertia or compromise. Jesus did not demand men's acceptance of any creed or doctrinal formulation before they could follow him. He offered, rather, a personal relation with himself. He invited them, as they were, to follow him.

Second, while keeping in mind what has been said, the preacher will note that the assumptions of Jesus were essentially doctrinal, and that his preaching was founded on a doctrinal basis. He was able to presuppose that his hearers—even those whom he invited to follow him—had a definite knowledge of his main positions, and he could start from there. The modern preacher, however, dares not make such an assumption. It may be a sad commentary on Christian instruction that only a few in the average congregation are sufficiently grounded in Christian doctrine to follow the preacher who presupposes that certain doctrines are common knowledge, but it is nevertheless true. For the rank and file of church congregations the Bible is, if not a closed book, at least a difficult enigma; they know a little more than nothing about the great doctrines of the faith; and their ignorance of the history of the Church is pathetic. The modern preacher must start from scratch. Paul did this. He started from where the people were—notice his starting point in his sermon on



Mars' hill (Acts 17:22-31)—but his place of departure was far removed from that of our Lord's. He was preaching in a different cultural environment and facing idolatry and heathenism. Those whom he sought to win dwelt in an atmosphere of "lords many and gods many." So the modern preacher must recognize the religious illiteracy of many who make up his congregation and set himself the task of educating them in the things in which we verily believe. The basic doctrines of the faith need to be expounded with the greatest care, placed in their modern setting, and applied to contemporary life. Preachers must survey the ground which as teachers of religion they ought to cover, and at the end of a reasonable ministry should have the satisfaction of knowing that they have proclaimed the whole truth of God.

#### POLEMIC

The critical attitude of the scribes and Pharisees from the very beginning of our Lord's ministry determined the form of his preaching to them. The scholars tell us that the passages which record his preaching to them are readily distinguishable from the rest of his utterances by their tone, vocabulary, and the nature of the matters discussed. Probably only the experts can really distinguish the differences in vocabulary and phraseology, but the differences in style and content are clear to most readers. The tone on occasions is hard, if not bitter, and the denunciations are prominent and in a sense disturbing. Because of this it is only fair both to Jesus and to the Pharisees to stress the possibility that the later antagonism between Christianity and Judaism may have colored the records of their conflict. In the heat of the later controversy the early Christians may have so emphasized Jesus' denunciations that they gained a prominence not in accord with fact when the Gospels came to be written. To

suggest this, however, is not to encourage the all too prevalent sentimental conception of him and his preaching. When we pass over the sterner notes to stress those that are softer, we do violence to truth and rob his preaching of balance. Alongside his words of love to the outcasts, the fallen, and the lost we must place his uncompromising hatred of the things that robbed men of their happiness and sense of sonship; alongside his friendliness we must place his indignant antagonisms; and alongside his comfortable words we must place his invectives. It is impossible to take away the caustic flame of his anger without destroying the strong perfection of his manhood. "The nature of man is his whole nature," said Pascal. We must accept that position regarding Jesus. To strip him of his forceful moods, aggressive attitudes, and provocative utterances is an unwarranted mutilation.

Although the clash between Jesus and the religious leaders was inevitable, it possibly did not start with the intensity the records appear to reflect. During the opening period of his ministry, at least, Jesus was in friendly converse with some of the Pharisees. Mark (2:17) would suggest that in the early period when they were critical of his conduct he met them not with invective but with gentle irony. Some scholars think that if their conception of the Law prevented the Pharisees from understanding Jesus, it was not because he did not make an almost irresistible appeal to them. The parable of the prodigal son was addressed to them, and in view of this fact it cannot be said that he never sought to win them. But there is no avoiding the fact that toward the end he carried the fight to them. He was not content to let them do all the attacking and accusing. He brought charges against them and accused them of hypocrisy, of self-satisfaction and display, of love of honors and lack of humility. He reproached them for extortion and denounced their casuistry. And there can be no doubt that his aggression sealed his fate.



Jesus might have escaped much criticism and possibly Calvary had he "played up to" the Pharisees a little or, in some matters, "sat on the fence." Because of the normal desire to be popular, admired, and held in high esteem, some preachers avoid the frontal attack, preferring to hint rather than to speak explicitly. "Safety first" is an excellent motto for the preacher only as he drives his car. His ever-present temptation is to be adroit, to engage in a conspiracy of silence, to avoid issues that are controversial, disturbing, and provocative of trouble—in short, to compromise with his conscience.

"Get thee behind me, Satan," was our Lord's response to this temptation. He regarded inner sincerity for himself and for others as fundamental to the growth of personality. He believed that the integrity of his own mind was sacred. Indeed, few things aroused his indignation as did the divorce of outward profession from inner belief, with the consequent inconsistency of action. Prudence, tactical care, worldly wisdom, subtle evasions, and mental reservations were foreign to him. He ignored the subtleties of ethical expediency; and his simple honesty, his hatred of humbug and hypocrisy, his sincerity of purpose and passion for what he believed to be true held him to a course from which he refused to swerve the breadth of a hair.

The Christian pulpit is for accredited leaders in whom the noblest aspirations of men find a voice, not for subtle masters in the art of compromise. True, a preacher must know how to comfort them that mourn in Zion; he must learn to speak comfortably to Jerusalem and to cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned. But it is to forget and to forfeit the prime prerogative of the preacher's calling to utter smooth and comforting sentiments when nations are being threatened from within and from without. To cry peace when there is no peace either is a deliberate attempt to escape from realities or is the expression of a fifth-

column complex. Every age has its special sins. Sin may have its origin in the hearts of men; but it can enter social customs, institutions, and national plans; and, toward all its manifestations—no matter how hoary they may be with age, or how much money is invested in them, or how many people support them—the preacher should have but one attitude, that of unceasing and uncompromising opposition. There are those vital occasions when the authentic voice of true preaching is heard denouncing the individual with “Thou art the man!” or men and nations with “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

### APOLOGETIC

The word “apology”<sup>1</sup> means a speech in defense. Plato in his *Apology* gives the defense of Socrates against the charges which led to his death. In this sense the Greek original is used in the New Testament by Festus (Acts 25:16). Paul used it in a somewhat wider sense when he wrote of “the clearing of themselves” by the Corinthians (II Cor. 7:11), and when he addressed the Philippians as partakers with him of grace in “bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel” (Phil. 1:7). Thus, in the second and third centuries, the Christian fathers who defended Christianity against the arguments and calumnies of Judaism and paganism are usually called “Apologists.” From about the eighteenth century the word has been used in its technical sense of “the argumentative defense of Christianity.” It is important to notice that the uses of the word “apology” in the sense of an excuse and of the word “apologetic” as describing an undignified or even servile manner are both irrelevant to the meaning of the word “apologetics.”

Although polemic and apologetic preaching may sometimes

<sup>1</sup> ἀπολογία (from ἀπό and λόγος).



merge into each other, we distinguish between them. The former is more aggressive; it is an attack rather than a defense. The preacher is defiant, often fierce and ruthless, uncompromisingly offensive, provocative, and his purpose is to confute and confound. On the other hand, the latter is rather in the nature of a vindication. The preacher, though firm, is reasonable and tolerant, and his purpose is to win and persuade men to his view or doctrine. He will be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks him a reason of the hope that is in him. Both methods are legitimate, and sometimes attack is the best method of defense. To prove the truth of one's position, it may be necessary to prove an opponent's position false.

Without doubt the finest defense Jesus had to offer the men of his day for the truth he proclaimed was himself. The quality of a preacher's life should always be the strongest commendation of the truth he preaches. The early Christians, who "outlived, outdied, and outthought" the pagans, knew the meaning of apologetics. It is the life that Jesus lived, the quality of the Spirit that possessed him, and the character he was, together with the lives of historic and living persons reflecting something of the same quality and spirit, which present the strongest defense of the Christian religion.

It is quite true that Jesus was not called upon to defend his teaching against the attacks of differing religions and systems. His frequent conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees were not concerned with what we understand as basic doctrines. The difference between them was really the difference between the prophetic spirit and the legal, between two ways of approaching the problem of conduct. Jesus was primarily concerned with the individual heart as the source of conduct; the Pharisees were concerned with law and acts. Their system rested on the proposition that character is determined by conduct, and that by setting up an authoritative standard and

enforcing it, men will be habituated to virtue. It was chiefly around these differences of approach that the conflict centered. The situation was greatly changed, however, for the apostles after our Lord's death and resurrection. The opposition of the Pharisees deepened in intensity not only because they realized that the teaching of Jesus threatened their whole system but because of the divine status the apostles gave to Jesus. In him these men had felt the power of a new spiritual force; they thought him to be wondrously great, so great, in fact, that they put him in the highest categories of which they had knowledge. Thus, from the very beginning the Christian religion had to defend itself against attacks, first from Judaism and then from paganism. The mission to the Gentiles immediately involved the early missionaries in conflict with differing religions, cults, and philosophies. The New Testament reflects these controversies, and it may be regarded as a handbook of Christian apologetics. Recent criticism makes it clear that the gospel narratives are intended to be not only a record of facts but facts selected and presented with an apologetic purpose. That is to say they are colored at many points with the ethical and doctrinal interests of the Christian groups out of which they emerge. Broadly defined, the Synoptic Gospels defend the messiahship of Jesus, and the Fourth presents him as the incarnate Logos. Paul was concerned in his preaching and writings not only to proclaim but to interpret and defend the gospel.

Apologetic preaching seeks to win men to the faith that Christian dogmatics describes and ethics prescribes. Being primarily concerned with the thought and life of its own age, it deals with those aspects of the Christian religion focused by the age. The qualifications for this task are exceedingly high; the preacher must be absolutely competent. He is dealing with truth, spiritual and eternal, yet truth that is held in the solution of a certain age and people. The preacher who would



apply the truth thus presented to his own age must first crystallize the truth itself. He must distinguish between the substance and the solvent. Having done this, he has the new solvent in modern conditions, speech, and outlook. He must walk up to the front door of the most searching intellect of his age and justify the truths he proclaims. He must live in his age, love it, and understand it; he must know something of its spirit and facts, its science and its philosophy, its literature and art, and its longings and its strivings. But however necessary and desirable these qualifications and qualities may be, they are worthless without a passionate belief in the truth the preacher seeks to persuade men to accept. As he loves the truth, so will he be scrupulously honest in stating his case. He will not use arguments which he knows are weak and limping, and if there is an honest doubt on any point he will frankly admit it. While knowledge, ability, and skill are necessary, strict honesty, unquestioned sincerity, and love of truth are essential. It is most disastrous for the preacher, whose highest duty lies in defending and commending the truth, to nurse mental reservations of any kind whatsoever. Well did John Morley begin his book *Compromise* by quoting from Archbishop Whately: "It makes all the difference in the world whether we put Truth in the first or the second place." The preacher of apologetics must "speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

### ETHICAL

There is no such thing as a Christian ethic apart from the Christian religion. Our Lord's demand for repentance was a demand for a spiritual experience in which man realized his divine sonship, acknowledged one supreme loyalty, and turned his love upward toward God and outward toward his fellows. This was fundamental to all his preaching, and unless this

fact is recognized it is not possible to appreciate his "ethics." Jesus knew nothing of ethics as an independent discipline. Morality in his preaching is inseparably bound up with religion. And believing thus, he stressed the inward character and motive as distinct from outward acts of which motive and character are the roots (Luke 6:43-45).

The modern preacher need not apologize to anyone, least of all to the ethical idealist, for insisting on conversion as the first essential of good conduct. The man who is right with God has taken the first step toward being right with his fellows, and, what is more, he possesses the spiritual and emotional drive to act rightly. "To preach morality is easy," remarked Schopenhauer; "to find a foundation for morality is hard." It is apart from religion. Yet, if philosophers agree upon anything they agree that the conduct of men is a matter of supreme consequence. And there is a growing concern, a well-grounded alarm that apart from religion they can find no binding laws, no well-knit principles of human conduct. Though they would like to dispense with religion, and though they are far removed from its essential spirit, they sometimes reluctantly speak patronizingly of it because of the support it lends to goodness and virtue. They would like to identify religion with ethics, make it, as Matthew Arnold did, "morality touched with emotion."

Ethical teaching apart from religion is futile. It is of the earth, earthy, never lifting its eyes from the present scene, thinking only of the prosperity and security of the moment. The sole objects of its interests and concern are society and its institutions. And here we notice the fundamental difference between the preaching of Jesus and the teaching of the rabbis. As we have seen, Jesus was primarily concerned with the individual soul in its relation to God and to life. He had a love for men. He was interested in their interests, concerned about their circumstances, grieved because of their sins, and



anxious to help, to heal, and to save them. The rabbis, on the other hand, were primarily concerned with the Law and the community as a whole. The Law knows no friends, cherishes no affection for the individual; and even when it deals with the case of a particular person, the principles upon which it acts and the conclusions to which it comes are such as are applicable throughout society. It presents, as it must present to all alike and at all times, an inflexible countenance. For it, as for the modern totalitarian state, the individual is a mere abstraction; the true and only reality is the state or the community. So for ethics the individual's soul, his peculiar circumstances, his particular environment, his personal hopes and aims, and his eternal destiny are entirely irrelevant.

For those who heeded his call to repentance, Jesus insisted on the absolute priority of the two great commandments: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:4-5), and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. 19:18). "There is none other commandment greater than these," he said (Matt. 12:31). Jesus was himself the living example of this attitude toward God and man which he demanded from his followers. For him God's will was the determining factor; in our phraseology, it was his moral absolute; and the thought expressed in the two commandments—love to God and love to man—approximated to it. Moral absolutes are out of fashion today. The absolute has yielded place to the relative, the ideal to the real. And in so far as the pulpit has yielded to the spirit of the age, it has lost power—and respect.

The drift away from the absolutes to the relatives in this century has caused first the corruption and then the collapse of cultures and countries; it has corrupted national, commercial, social, and domestic relations; and it has been the ruination of countless lives. Instead of standards of conduct that

hold from place to place or moral values that endure from age to age through all eternity, we have situations and circumstances, and according to these we give judgment. From our point of view this relativistic philosophy of life has stripped the prophetic utterance of its dignity, robbed it of its power, and denuded it of its authority. But—and this is the point to be stressed—only in so far as the preacher himself has yielded to its blighting influence is this so. The preacher who proclaims to the understanding of his age, "Thus saith the Lord," or "This do and thou shalt live," or "Thou shalt love," is the true successor of the prophets and Jesus. Surely this is the authentic note of all true preaching; nay, more, preaching ceases to be preaching when the preacher has no absolute to appeal to and no eternal principle to proclaim.

From the fact that the kingdom of God meant man's compliance with God's will, it followed that the establishment of the kingdom necessitated for men a certain way of life. Jesus expounded the kingdom as a way of life, first, by example and, second, by devoting much of his time to specifying the kind of conduct the sons of God ought to exhibit. The ethics of the kingdom can never be separated from Jesus himself. As the obedient Son, he embodied the kingdom in his own person. The eternal value of his recorded sayings is not in their telling us how we ought to behave but in their telling us about him, mediating to us his spirit, and revealing his fundamental attitudes. In setting forth the kingdom as a way of life, he did not lay down a set of rules and regulations for conduct. He rather gave his followers an insight into the meaning of goodness itself, the innermost quality at the heart of life. He wasted no time manicuring the minor moralities, splitting ethical hairs regarding the rightness or wrongness of specific social pleasures or habits or arbitrating in family disputes (Luke 12:13). He did not legislate in the sense of elaborating a code of laws to be enforced on individuals either by himself



or others; he rather gave direction in a number of precepts which he addressed to the free and responsible will of men.

In expounding this to the keen critical minds of the younger generation, the preacher will recognize two things: First, the ethics of Jesus do not claim to give explicit and detailed direction covering the wide range of modern life. If this is claimed for them, disappointment and disillusionment will surely follow. There is more detailed moral advice in Plato or Seneca than is to be found in the Synoptic Gospels. "If Christianity was morals," said William Blake, "then Socrates was the Saviour." The ethics of Jesus are really a challenge to the moral and spiritual possibilities of men. They achieve their purpose by awakening in men responsive attitudes, and by leading them out to new moral and spiritual ventures. As expressions of his spirit they are normative for the Christian life. Rather than dictating positive guidance in details, as the whole scheme of rules and regulations of Judaism did, they aim at redeeming men's attitudes by lifting them into a sphere of new insights.

Second, the preacher should recognize that all the values that are prized and sought after by modern intelligent and virile young people are not fulfilled in Jesus. He was neither an Admirable Crichton nor an Aunt Tabitha. His life was limited to his age, to the situation it presented, and to his experience in it. There are large areas of human life and experience, with duties and opportunities involved in them, of which he was ignorant, but which for modern youth are all-important. Instead of making claims that cannot be substantiated, the preacher will stress the fact that the life and preaching of Jesus reveal new depths of meaning in moral and spiritual attitudes; they disclose the ultimate quality of spirit in man's relation to God. Both Jesus' life and his ethics challenge and inspire men to venture for the highest in countless situations and conditions of which he himself had no direct cognizance.

No one can fail to appreciate the challenging note in the ethical preaching of Jesus. He was a practical psychologist, and he knew how to appeal to men—particularly young men. The story of the apostles, the biographies of outstanding Christians, and the noble lives of countless thousands of his followers in their own restricted spheres testify that men rise to their full stature when they respond to the challenge of Jesus. Give a man a set of rules and regulations as did Judaism, and they will sink to a cramped, lifeless condition; challenge them with a high spiritual adventure, startle their souls into admiration, ask of them the impossible, if you will, and they respond with angelic strength. Jesus told men that they were the sons of God, and they rose to the crest of their powers. If the story of man throughout the ages proclaims anything of man's nature, it is that men will never cease to attempt the impossible and assault the impregnable. Negations, laws, regulations, suppressions are without avail; there is in them no inspiration, and they have no challenging power. But put before men an ideal, a soul-awakening vision, and you can do with them what you please. They stand erect, endure hardship, face danger, strive continually, and press onward.

It is recognized that there are some precepts given by Jesus which, if meticulously and literally observed, will lead to chaotic conditions. These may create problems for those who do not realize that Jesus was an Oriental speaking to Orientals in the idiom to which they were accustomed. The speech of an Oriental, even today, must not be interpreted too literally. His utterances must be judged not altogether by the way he says them but by what he means. And some of the precepts given by Jesus must be interpreted in this way—they are to be understood according to the spirit and not according to the letter. Further, the Gospels in our New Testament are translations from the Greek, and the precepts in the Greek Gospels are probably translations from the Aramaic tongue,



in which they were uttered. We cannot be too certain, therefore, that the exact shade of meaning of the original precept is contained in our translations. Preachers will be saved from becoming slaves to the letter by remembering that Jesus was no legalist. He gave a standard of values and some guiding principles which are to be interpreted in the light of his whole preaching and spirit. No one precept can fully express an unchanging principle and make its manifold applications, though some may do so to a greater extent than others. As we have seen, the clearest and most adequate summary of his whole teaching is to be found in his injunction to love both God and man. But even this injunction to love demands that we exercise our intellectual and moral powers if we are to apply it faithfully in the complex relationships of modern life.

Finally, the ethics of Jesus have social implications. The kingdom of God in the thought of Jesus is manifested on earth and in the present in the existence of human subjects who own God as their King, who look to him for protection, guidance, and a rule of life, who offer to him their absolute loyalty, complete trust, and willing obedience. And the evidence warrants the inference that Jesus thought of the future "coming" of the kingdom—just as he thought of its inception and growth—as taking place on earth. Though the early Christians conceived of the kingdom in terms of messianism and apocalypticism, they expected the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ. The modern Christian must be made to realize that he too has a stake in the social order. He is a social unit. Every advance in the integration of his will and desires is always relative to his social context. The integration of the individual and the organization of the social order are thus inextricably interdependent. In an ill-organized social system no man can become what he is meant to be. Unless the preacher himself has become so befogged in the ideology of the inner life or has

fled to a transcendental world, he will realize the utter futility of attempting to regenerate the souls of men when the total secular environment in which they live, and to which their true inner life is a living response, is left unmodified and untouched by the Christian religion. The forces of nationalism, communism, secularism, and capitalism, organized as they are in the dominant institutions of our day, compel practices that are diametrically opposed to the Christian's perfecting his personality for eternal life in fellowship with God.

Most preachers discover sooner or later that they cannot remain loyal to their conception of Jesus and the kingdom he proclaimed and preach a gospel of escape from the actual order of the world. They cannot flee the world, nor can they flee him whom they have believed. Over against the kingdoms of this world with their wrong conceptions and perceptions stands the kingdom of God with its righteousness, its peace, and its gladness in the Holy Spirit, and inevitably they make contrasts and declare the discrepancy between the two. These preachers are forced by the very validity of their call to fight against the cupidities and stupidities that prevent democracy from becoming in truth a Christian democracy. There is a great urge in their souls, as real as their call to preach, to find the way through the teeming welter of difficulties and contradictions in the modern world to practice the ethics of Jesus their Lord. From this aspect their major task is to assist in the process of transforming society to make our Lord's law of love increasingly practicable for an ever-growing number.

### ESCHATOLOGICAL

Thoroughgoing eschatologists of the Weiss-Schweitzer school regard the teaching of Jesus as an interim ethic—an ethic for the brief period which was to intervene before the second coming. They hold that he mistakenly believed that



the appearance of the Son of man—Messiah on the clouds, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the supernatural establishment of the kingdom of God were quickly to succeed one another in the very near future; hence his teaching was little more than a penitential discipline in preparation for these events. Schweitzer maintains that for Jesus there is no ethic of the kingdom of God, for in it all natural relationships are abolished. Temptation and sin have no place in God's perfect kingdom; therefore the teaching that urges men to serve, to humble themselves, to incur persecution and death must belong to the interim.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Jesus was not a preacher or teacher but simply a herald of the coming kingdom.

Schweitzer's theory is unacceptable not only because, despite his reverence for the character of Jesus, he exhibits him as a self-deluded dreamer who forced his own fate and was the fashioner of his own tragedy but also because, when the central emphasis of our Lord's preaching is rightly estimated, the ethical rather than the eschatological predominates. Nevertheless, there are many perplexities which attend the interpretation of our Lord's eschatological predictions. Some scholars in this field of research say frankly that the gospel apocalypse is certainly marked by features of apparent discord, and it suggests that Jesus entertained expectations which history has not fulfilled. The perplexities are such that it is impossible to regard them with detachment or indifference.

In tracing the idea of the kingdom of God and the messianic hope in Jewish revelation literature the student is struck by the fact that consistency and rationality are merely incidental considerations, and that there is no coherent doctrine or uniformity of belief concerning either the kingdom or the Messiah. The variety, profusion, and confusion of apocalyptic forms and the highly symbolic nature of apocalyptic language

<sup>2</sup> *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 364.

make it difficult to understand and interpret them. Yet, when the student recognizes their peculiar literary characteristics and the purpose for which they were written, he is able to appreciate something of their force and value. All apocalyptic writings are more or less obscure. They have been well called "tracts for bad times"; and their purpose was to witness against the oppressor, to announce his approaching doom, and to keep alive the faith and to maintain the morale of the oppressed. The apocalyptic mystic-poet-prophet staked all his hopes on some violent manifestation of God at the end which he thought to be near at hand, and he sought by the exercise of his imagination to picture the shape of things to come. His central theme was not the destruction of the wicked nor the last things but the kingdom. He did not argue or define; he told visions, described dreams, and painted word pictures calculated to stir men's emotions and to fire imaginations.

It cannot be stressed too frequently that Jesus was a man of his age. His unfolding consciousness was nurtured and developed by the ideas embodied in the literature and traditions of his people. His thought forms were determined for him, and his revelation was of necessity bound up with these categories. To him and to his contemporaries apocalypse was as native as the air and soil; it was their heritage; and it formed part of their religious background. Whenever we find in the Gospels imaginative teaching or predictions of future events such as the coming of the Son of man, or the last things, we are in the presence of apocalypse, and Jesus is making use of the old familiar symbols in which to express some aspect of truth.

His predictions concerning the character and office of the Son of man are as varied as his presentations of the kingdom. There is little difference between the nature and character of the gospel apocalypse and other Jewish apocalypses, nor are the prophecies it contains easier to reconcile with one another. Sometimes our Lord's conception of the Son of man—Mes-



siah as judge and ruler finds expression in predicting that his coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory will be preceded by famines, pestilences, earthquakes (Matt. 24:7), a great tribulation (21), and accompanied by celestial pyrotechnics (29). Sometimes, in harmony with those parables which liken the kingdom to the slowly growing seed and to the leaven which gradually does its work, he predicts his coming as a spiritual process, a thing that is to go on continually in the experience of men (Matt. 26:64). Other illustrations revealing apparent contradictions not only in the manner but also in the time of his coming may be quoted, but they cannot be harmonized with one another. They belong to the realm of vision and poetry and do not lend themselves to a dogmatic or logical analysis. Precisely what our Lord expected to happen when he thus made use of apocalyptic language is beyond conjecture.

A clue to the interpretation of apocalyptic predictions is to be found in Peter's contention on the day of Pentecost that the manifestation of the Spirit was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:14-21). Peter apparently concerned himself only with the promise of the Spirit of God being poured out upon all flesh, and he did not expect to witness the dramatic wonders in the heavens and in the earth—"blood and fire and pillars of smoke." He quoted the prophet as saying: "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come" (Joel 2:31), and the fact that these things had not happened influenced neither him nor the three thousand souls who gladly received his word and were baptized.

If we take Peter's interpretation as a guide, we shall not be led astray by the highly imaginative elements nor unduly perplexed by the details of our Lord's apocalyptic predictions. Recognizing the freedom of poetic license and all the other characteristics of apocalypse, we shall be guided in our inter-

pretations of his predictions by our faith and our experience. Not to interpret some of his eschatological predictions thus is to become involved in serious difficulties. For instance, if in one place (Matt. 18:22) we find Jesus telling a man to forgive to the uttermost, seventy times seven, and in another (25:41) we read that when the Son of man shall come in his glory, he shall say unto them on his left hand: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," we must recognize the presence of apocalypse and decide which statement is in harmony with his character and main teaching.

In the above prophecy (Matt. 25:31-46) the eschatological elements of judgment and retribution are set forth in the characteristic vivid imagery of the Jewish revelation books, but the significant and original thing about the prediction is that Jesus declares the moral determination of human destiny. Here he strikes the ethical note and brings out the eternal implications of his law of love by making it the test of the final judgment. Never did he speak with less qualification.

Deeper than his messianic consciousness was his filial consciousness. This was the supreme fact about him. His life rotated round one center—God. And it was this knowledge of the Father that compelled him to change, modify, and transform many of the old messianic conceptions; and if we find difficulty with the imaginative terms in which he described the character and office of the Son of man, we may be guided to a correct understanding of them by the character he was and the Father he revealed.

The interpretation of his predictions concerning the kingdom is also most difficult. No one picture illustrates all the aspects of his thought of it. He conceived it as being present and future, ideal and actual, social and individual, visible and invisible, within and without, in time and in eternity. J. H. Leckie contends that all of Jesus' predictions, interpreted in



the free spirit of apocalypse, correspond to realities and can be reconciled by faith. He argues that if Jesus said that the coming kingdom was to be gradual and hidden yet also sudden and apparent, the fact is that spiritual principles do work secretly, yet they finally reveal themselves in vivid manifestations. And if Jesus taught both a moral and a material view of the messianic state, the truth is that the kingdom is a thing of inward and outward life of body and of soul. But whatever the explanation, there is no avoiding the fact that there are difficulties—difficulties of such a nature that they may not lightly be set aside. We are faced with two extremely awkward problems—the intellectual limitations of Jesus and the religious value of an at least partly erroneous eschatology.

Apocalypse refuses to satisfy our insatiable craving for finality, certainty, and authority. Like the kingdom of God it foretells, apocalypse is without walls. Jesus was able to draw out of the inward springs of his personal experience when he spoke of the Father and man's filial relation to him. He was able to speak with authority about God's perfect fatherhood, his spiritual and ethical character, and his loving disposition. And he was able to reveal the Father to men in his own life in the character he was; but when it came to piercing the veil of the future and to describing those things "which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived," his human intelligence failed him, and naturally he used the only medium available—apocalypse. True, he filled many of the ancient forms with a new content and transformed many popular messianic aspects of faith and hope for the future.

Further, although it is difficult to estimate with sufficient accuracy the extent to which his disciples, or the various groups of believers through whose minds the traditions passed, colored our Lord's eschatological predictions, the evidence is sufficient to show that there was this tendency. It is possible

that many of the difficulties are due, not to our Lord's thought, but to the eschatological outlook of his immediate followers.

The belief and experience of the early Church testify to the fact that his consciousness of vocation and his faith in God were gloriously vindicated, although not in the manner depicted by apocalypse. His "rising from the dead" though dramatic was unaccompanied by "wonders in the heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath." The accounts of his appearance to his disciples are more impressive and convincing because these elements are absent. What is astonishing as we read the Acts is the transformation in the outlook and spirit of the disciples. Of a truth, they were indeed men who "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight." His risen presence not only strengthened them for life but also imparted confidence to them in the face of death. They did not fear to live the life of faith he had lived and to meet death not as victims but as conquerors. God, they knew, had set eternity in their hearts.

Rightly or wrongly, the early Christians expected the kingdom to come in a contemporary second coming of Jesus. It came, in part, not as they expected but as an organized community. As we look over the history of the past two thousand years, it appears that because of its very nature the kingdom has always been in the future, yet present; it has been an ideal and, at the same time, an actual experience. And it will continue to be so until "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." Man is never satisfied with things as they are; he is always reaching out to that which is before. He stands amid the imperfections, the wrongs, and the failures of the present; and he looks to a new age of righteousness, a holy theocratic state, a world made safe for democracy, or a new world order. Each successive age will see



its own vision and work for its realization. Jesus encourages, nay, urges us to work and pray that the kingdom may come.

The preacher will take cognizance of the fact that although Jesus was influenced by the eschatological ideas of his day and seemed to picture his own second coming in the colors of flaming vision and as a swiftly hastening doom, his mind despite appearances was not dominated by any fixed dogma of an eschatological program. He differed from the apocalyptic seers on fundamental issues. They subordinated all ethical teaching, all historical statement, and all doctrinal speculation to the prophecy of the end, but Jesus found evidence of the kingdom breaking through into the present. They thought of God as transcendent; he emphasized the Father's immanence. They had no faith in the power of spiritual forces to redeem humanity, and their outlook on the present scene was entirely pessimistic, but he was hopeful and joyous. He believed that the forces of life would overcome the powers of disease and death. They were bitter, intolerant, and violent in their judgments of their fellows, but he was generous and kindly. He saw the pathos of the shepherdless sheep, sought for spiritual possibilities in the most unlikely characters, and found a place for publicans and sinners in the kingdom.

In spite of these differences and the confusion of apocalyptic predictions generally, there are certain underlying beliefs common to Jesus and the apocalyptists. The first of these to emerge is that the future is full of promise. In staking everything on some mighty manifestation of God at the end—which they thought was near at hand—the apocalyptists affirmed their belief in the final supremacy of God. No matter how dark the night, they looked forward with confidence to the coming day. In this Jesus was at one with them.

Days of crisis create an atmosphere in which the negative rather than the positive side of this belief is seen. Men think of the destruction of evil rather than of the victory of the

good. And there are those, endowed by nature with a plentiful lack of understanding and weighed down with a load of painfully acquired ignorance, who can view the contemporary scene only in the light of the books of Daniel and Revelation. Critical, apocalyptic days such as these of terrifying scientific inventions and discoveries, of fateful world movements, present them with plenty of excuses for their doleful wail that the race is whirling into a vortex of utter disaster. It is not the preacher with a lust for "prophecy"—enmeshed in certain narrow and ignorant interpretations of eschatology, trying to fit contemporary events and movements into the dramatic scenery of John's vision, urging that the last dire conflict is on—who is needed today. It is the preacher whose eschatology contains the authentic and positive note that good must triumph over evil. It is he who discerns divine forces at work in human life under all its vicissitudes, and who believes in the kingdom "towards which the whole creation moves." Only preachers with this apocalyptic hope can utter the words that will keep men on their feet; only those who believe that "God fulfils himself in many ways" can proclaim a steadying message to a bewildered world struggling desperately to rehabilitate itself.

Belief in a life to come also underlies both our Lord's and Jewish eschatology, and this belief is unaffected by the differing and often conflicting speculations regarding the resurrection of the dead, judgment, heaven, hell. If ever there was a time when preachers should declare with conviction the Christian faith concerning the life to come, the time is now. If preachers really believe what the New Testament affirms—that our Lord has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel—now is the time to make it known. An eschatology that will be faithful to the central verities and at the same time be preachable to men and women of this age is of imperative necessity.



## Open-Air Evangelism

IT WAS NOT OF NECESSITY BUT OF CHOICE THAT JESUS WENT out into the highways and byways to preach to the people there. He made his appeal to the man in the street as well as to the man in the synagogue. The climatic conditions and the social habits of the East were particularly favorable for open-air preaching. It was not difficult to attract a crowd; in fact it was the usual custom for audiences to assemble in the open. For a preacher like Jesus—sympathetic and understanding, lucid and untrammelled—the opportunities for effective preaching were many and varied. Most of his set sermons and many of his arresting and picturesque utterances bear the marks of God's great out-of-doors—the sower and the seed, the dragnet, the lost sheep, the vineyard and its laborers, and the children playing in the market place.

Good-humored contempt would probably greet the parsonic preacher with a holy tone should he attempt to preach on the corner of the street. If a crowd gathered to hear him, it is quite certain that he would not be permitted to "get away with it," and he himself would find the atmosphere strangely different from the prepared and even soporific atmosphere of his church. The cloistered academic preacher would probably regard the crowd on the corner of the street with ill-concealed disdain and refuse to cast his pearls before it. He might say with the Roman poet, "*Odi profanum vulgus.*" Yet, if both would observe the successful street-corner preacher they would learn much not only about preaching but also about men and their reactions to religious viewpoints. There is always a lot of hot air at meetings on the street corner, but there is also

fresh air. There are other things, too: amusement, humor, earnestness, reality, and often passion. The open-air preacher knows the man in the street is a real good fellow with a large component of latent religion. He welcomes all questions, interjections, and witticisms, for spontaneity is his ally. He has studied his audience, and he knows its thinking, its interests, and its needs. He is familiar, in fact, with the conditions under which most of its members work and live, as the average preacher is familiar with the standardized tastes, prejudices, and ideals of a respectable middle-class congregation.

After we have taken the differences in race and country and period into consideration, the essential psychology of men in a crowd varies little from country to country and from age to age. Probably in the time of Jesus, as now, the real difficulty would be that of preserving continuity. Questions and interjections would tend to divert the discussion along bypaths. Apart from what we know about the compilation of the gospel narratives, it is possible that the fragmentary character of our Lord's preaching and its topical and occasional nature may have been due to this tendency in open-air preaching. It gives the impression, on occasions, that it was called forth by question or addressed to the passing needs of the moment.

Jesus was a successful open-air preacher (Mark 3:7-9; Matt. 4:25), and his popularity was due not only to his personality but to his methods and the content of his preaching. Although he did not achieve all that he hoped for in his appeal to the general public, he believed that his preaching would produce results. C. J. Cadoux points out that our Lord's lamentation over those Galilean towns which did not repent suggests very strongly that he was disappointed with them, and still less mistakable is the tone of disappointment in his address to Jerusalem (Luke 13:34=Matt. 23:37, Q). Side by side with these well-attested words, and in confirmation of them, we may set the somewhat less strongly attested, but very credible,



account of what happened as Jesus approached Jerusalem for the last time (Luke 19:41-44, L). If words mean anything, Jesus expresses in these passages a real and a passionate disappointment.<sup>1</sup> He was disappointed and in a sense frustrated because the people of Jerusalem did not flock together under him. Judging, however, by the manner in which Jerusalem did receive him on his last visit, and remembering the anxiety of the ruling officials over him, we may think that had Jesus been permitted to preach a little longer the results may have been as he first expected.

The parable of the sower (Mark 4:3-9 = Matt. 13:3-9 = Luke 8:5-8), when considered apart from the allegorical interpretation of it which Jesus is represented as having given, is now widely recognized, not primarily as a pictorial description of different types of listeners, but as an encouraging analogy between preaching and agriculture. Just as the farmer, despite the various risks of waste and failure attending his work, can yet be sure that nature will yield him a fine crop, so Jesus, as a preacher, had confidence that despite a percentage of unresponsive hearers he could yet count on convincing and winning a substantial number. And there can be no doubt that he did. He was sometimes embarrassed by the popular acclaim that greeted him. He caused a tide of intense expectancy to rise through the country, and, according to John's report, the air was electric with an excitement that even threatened on occasions to become a political danger. Jesus retreated to the hills to escape the crowd (6:15), and when "that fox" Herod Antipas learned of the public clamor that Jesus was arousing, he sought to destroy him. Jesus was forced to leave Jewish territory for the coast of Tyre and Sidon, and there he "entered into an house, and would have no man know it" (Mark 7:24). The idea that the crowd turned against him at the end

<sup>1</sup> *The Historic Mission*, pp. 191-93.

is not quite in harmony with the gospel evidence. It was the Sadducean clique—"the Quislings and the Lavals of that day, the collaborationists with Rome"—who plotted to seize him, because, as it is written, "they were afraid of the people."

It is commonly accepted, often without thought, that Jesus was popular until he began to reveal the inwardness of his message and to make his demands upon men. While it may be true that many found it coincided with their wishes to be followers of Jesus while there was some hope of an earthly kingdom but left him when their hope faded, is it correct to interpret their action as the general behavior of men to his challenge? Those who followed Jesus for personal gain would naturally leave him when they discovered that he could not give them what they wanted. But it is surely not correct to think that when Jesus began to preach about cross bearing and counting the cost of discipleship there was a general falling away. Does not human history show that men like to be dared, and that they respond when challenged? Does not the story of nationalism and fascism prove that the more demanded of men the greater is their response? Did Hitler understand the psychology of men better than did Jesus, and could he make demands of them successfully where Jesus failed?

Our Lord's appeal to the crowds suggests that there was a sense in which he thought of them as corporate units. We know that he did think of Israel as a corporate unit, that is, as a moral and religious whole. The kingdom of God was itself, in part at least, a social conception. In the historical development of Jewish beliefs the idea of Israel as a "corporate personality" preceded the realization of the value of the individual; and after this realization in the exilic and postexilic periods the collective interest remained the normal background of personal religion. Something of this shows itself in the way Jesus apostrophized Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum and referred in the third person to Tyre and



Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrha, as if each of these were a moral unit (Matt. 11:21-24; Luke 10:13-16). His personal concern for these communities expressed itself in the terms in which he addressed them. So also we see manifested in his preaching an interest in sundry groups, in particular the publicans and sinners.

But although he recognized the differences in the various groups about him, he did not appeal to their class or group consciousness, nor did he play to their particular prejudices or flatter their vanities. He appealed to the common heart of man, and he offered to them all—Pharisees and publicans, rich men and poor men, the master class and the working class—a common deliverance. "When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (Matt. 9:36.) The secret of his power is to be found in the word "compassion." It is deplorable that so many preachers are not "moved with compassion" when they view the vast crowds untouched by, and apparently indifferent to, the Christian religion. Have these preachers no message for the multitude? Do they prize their gospel so little that they experience no compulsion to share it? Or do they lack the imagination to present their message in other than the conventional forms of organized worship?

Every preacher, of course, does not possess the necessary personality and qualities for open-air preaching, but in these days there are other methods of reaching the crowd and getting the message across which offer every preacher an opportunity. Compared with the motion pictures, the radio, the newspaper, and the popular magazine, open-air preaching may be the least effective. The point to be noticed and emphasized in all this is that Jesus went to the people. He used all the means open to him to communicate. The great preachers should be aware of the far-reaching influence their words

have when they contribute to such a publication as *The Reader's Digest*. Even in the outback sheep stations of New Zealand, I have spoken to men and women who have been arrested, interested, and influenced by the powerful and persuasive articles of Harry Emerson Fosdick. For the preacher with a real enthusiasm and the imagination to present his message arrestingly and effectively, these modern media of communication offer all the scope he needs.



## His Ruling Ideas and Their Relevance Today

THE PREACHING OF JESUS WAS DISTINCTIVE FOR ITS GREAT themes. It was big preaching, marked by bulk and girth. Consider some of his subjects: the fatherhood of God, the worth of man, the kingdom of God, and the supremacy of love. It is obvious that the preaching of Jesus cannot be regarded as a blueprint for the pulpit today. He was an itinerant preacher and did not face the same people twice on a Sunday year by year. To prepare a great sermon on a great theme every week over a long period is beyond the capacity of most, if not all, preachers. John Bright, the English statesman, in writing to a young man about to enter the ministry, said: "Nothing that I can think of would induce me to undertake to address the same audience once a week for a year." Nevertheless, this is no excuse for the preacher to deal prettily with side issues or to turn aside from great themes to wanton speculations. Great texts, radiant with meaning and challenging in their imaginative possibility, should save him from dealing with minor aspects of the gospel and their application to minor situations. The danger of selecting quaint, out-of-the-way, picturesque textlets is that they lend themselves to dainty sermons which, though attractive and excellent in their small way, are not spiritual food for hungry people. Their sweet nothings, vague mysticism, and pious air may please gentle souls, but they will never satisfy the keen minds of virile manhood, nor will they establish young lives in the great verities of the faith.

Good preaching, like the preaching of Jesus, centers around

profound truths. His preaching, as we have seen, was more than mere "heralding"; it was teaching. True preaching is both a proclamation and a body of truth. It is a story and an interpretation, and this interpretation embraces the great doctrines of the faith. So not only must the preacher proclaim as an evangelist and call men to God; he must teach, expound, and build his people up in God.

### *Content of Ideas*

The preaching of Jesus was marked, too, by the high quality of its content. It contained ideas. History bears witness to the fact that when the ideas Jesus set forth have been understood and re-emphasized they have produced revivals, reformations, and revolutions. Ideas are the most powerful things in the world, and they are rare. They do not come to a preacher; they must be sought after, and to this end true preachers read widely, study deeply, observe keenly, and strive continually. There is no place in the modern pulpit for a dull and idea-less preacher, for if a preacher cannot hold the minds of his congregation, he can never permanently capture their hearts. If he would make his congregation think, he must think himself. No amount of eloquence or emotional verbosity can atone for an empty sermon. W. L. Watkinson writes in his journal: "I was feeling very jaded and unequal to any intellectual activity, so I dropped in to hear ——— preach!" If a preacher would impress his hearers, if he would command their interest, if he would win their intellectual respect, his sermons must bear the marks of faithful work.

Divinity students and young preachers should be urged to make full use of the all-too-short flowering time of life to lay up a store of honey for the winter. Youth has charm, and people make generous allowances for its immaturity. A young preacher can get away with it on the strength of his looks, vivacity, friendliness, and earnestness; but unless he studies



hard and keeps his mind fresh and vigorous, youth will pass, and he will find when his earlier appeal has gone that he has no reserves of strength and culture. Preachers often fail in their middle life because they have lived too long on the edge of homiletic bankruptcy. A pleasant smile, a fine physique, good looks, and a charming manner may carry a preacher so far, but unless he works and reads and thinks, his mid-ministry will be full of tragic inefficiency. In a normal ministry there ought to be a rich harvest in the autumn that will provide bread for the shorter days.

### *Relevance of Ideas*

In the preaching of Jesus the third great mark was the relevance of his ideas. Although they possess an amazing relevance for men in all ages, they were especially relevant to the people in their peculiar situation to whom he preached. His preaching was timely as well as timeless. It was not a revelation in a vacuum. A preacher out of touch with his age is but a voice crying in the wilderness. Jesus brought his eternal and universal truth to the urgent issues that lay at hand and pressingly beset the men of his own race and time. His words: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," were characteristic of his whole attitude and approach.

No man stood nearer to the life of the eighteenth century than John Wesley. The historians of that period, as John Richard Green shows, cannot ignore him. Wesley knew his age, and he preached to it. He was in touch with the people all the time. Effective preaching has the freshness of its day upon it, and it is open-eyed to the possibilities and the needs of the hour. A sermon may be as full of truth as eggs are full of protein; but if it is not relevant to the hearts and minds of those who listen, it may just as well be full of sound and fury, for its truth will signify nothing. But if a preacher is

conscious of the fact that God is speaking through him, he will have something significant and relevant to say. His eternal truth will become the contemporary truth.

### *Definition of Ruling Ideas*

The ruling ideas of any age, science, art, music, behavior are those ideas which are so dominant that they control it. They determine its major movement, its special emphasis, its distinct form, and its accepted standards. Ideas may rule through long centuries or pass as a watch in the night; they may be held clearly and consciously or loosely and habitually; they may be handed down from generation to generation or acquired as a fashion. Historic periods of tranquillity and stability have always been marked by a general acceptance of clearly defined ruling ideas. In times of stress and strain the ruling ideas of the old order are challenged by the ideas of an order seeking to establish itself. The victory of the latter has often meant the dissolution of those forms, systems, and institutions which were thrown up and established by the ruling ideas of the old order. Periods like our own are marked by conflicting ideas struggling for supremacy. Today the conflict rages in all spheres of modern life. There is not a phase of modern life not touched by it. How long the conflict may rage none can tell, but of this we may be sure—the range of ideas which finally asserts its authority will dominate the course of history for generations.

To a great extent the history of the Christian religion has been the history of successive ideas that have ruled at certain periods among greater or lesser groups. The great schisms, numerous denominations, and small sects; the agelong controversies, diverse doctrines, and exclusive creeds; and the major movements, reforms, and revivals have been determined by ruling ideas. It is the ruling ideas, whether "held clearly, loosely, or in a fog," that determine the interpretation, pres-



entation, and emphasis of Christianity; they dictate the Church's government, organization, and forms; they rule the Christian's belief, worship, and conduct.

If we judge by the history of the past, it appears that the reign of ruling ideas is determined by their nature, quality, relevance, and the intensity with which they are held. Ruling ideas of a high quality, relevancy, and intensity pass quickly if their nature is temporary. And even those of a lasting nature will not continue to be held with intensity unless they are continually being restated in understandable terms to succeeding generations. The danger is that when ruling ideas lose their intensity they tend to become petrified into fixed forms, and their influence becomes less and less. The result is that ever-growing minorities cease to hold them, and the masses are no longer guided by them; in short, they cease to rule.

From this it will be seen that in preaching ruling ideas are of the utmost importance. They are the distinguishing marks between preachers and preaching. They determine the preacher's choice of a text or theme, organize his sermon, direct its movement, and select its emphasis. Great preaching, therefore, requires great ruling ideas. This brings to focus the real purpose of preaching: It is the proclamation and the exposition of the ruling ideas of our Lord in opposition to, or confirmation of, the ruling ideas of the present setup; it is the persuasion of men to enthrone these ideas in their personal lives and to seek to make them rule in society; it is the application of these ideas to the whole range of a man's life and his relationships, instructing him in his duties and privileges, inspiring his right attitudes, and calling him to be what he ought.

Let us examine Jesus' ruling ideas.

### *The Father God*

Ethical monotheism was fundamental to both Jesus and those to whom he preached. When Jesus came into the world

in the fullness of time, the Jew stood on a lofty pinnacle of faith, untouched and indeed unapproached by any other creed. There were elements in Judaism found nowhere else which were absolutely indispensable as a basis for the revelation of God in Jesus. It was not that Jesus taught anything essentially new or original, but that he emphasized certain things that transformed men's outlook and vitally affected their thinking and living. When Jesus spoke of God as Father he was not presenting a new and revolutionary doctrine for man's acceptance; he was simply expressing something that had been said by the prophets, psalmists, and sages of Israel for generations. What he did was make it a basis for delineating the nature and ways of God and charge it with a fullness and depth of meaning which for his hearers had no precedent. If, as some scholars think, Jesus seldom, if at all, spoke of God as Father before Caesarea Philippi, the fact still remains that this conception of God was dominant throughout his ministry and determined his emphasis and main contribution. It was a ruling idea both for himself in his personal experience and for his preaching. When the documents are arranged chronologically it may be seen that both Matthew and John use the term "Father" more freely than either Mark or Q, and this tendency may be regarded as an attempt to bring out clearly what appeared to these writers to be the essence of the gospel. With these, as with the rest of the New Testament writers, the authentic emphasis of Jesus is clearly evident. The conception of God's fatherhood was no mere theological commonplace but a fundamental and all-important reality. It was "a burning conviction, a spiritual experience which gave new meaning and value to life, and brought new peace and joy to human hearts."

In the mind and on the lips of Jesus the name "Father" stood for a relationship between God and man based on affection and mutual fellowship. Jesus took the human instinct



of fatherhood, uplifted it, and made it a symbol of the ethical qualities of God. Starting with the fact of fatherhood in common experience, he argued: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13.) He bade men believe in the loveliness of the Father. True, he taught that God punished sin; but the punishment was that of holy love; and, moreover, God's justice was shot through with mercy and an eagerness to forgive. This conception of God's fatherhood can never be extended too far, for it was the one clear and unequivocal thought in Jesus' mind. We may lay hold of all that we know of what a father or mother can be to their children, and we may apply it all to God and say: God's love is like that for us, only "how much more!"

This ruling idea of God's fatherhood determined the color, form, and value of all the other elements in his thought of God. It led him to modify the Jewish idea of God's transcendence. In the current Judaism of his time, influenced by apocalyptic thought, the unity, majesty, and holiness of God were emphasized to such a degree that he was thought to be far off and not easily approached by weak, sinful men. To Jesus, however, the Father was the ever-present reality, the center and soul of things. He clothed the lilies, fed the birds, made his sun to shine and his rain to fall. He was in and through all their life, struggling in their struggles, suffering in their pain, striving with them in every effort for improvement, and bearing in some way the sin and sorrow of men. Only rarely did our Lord apply the epithet "holy" to God, chiefly because it was associated with the thought of God's aloofness and unapproachableness. He could not use it as it was commonly understood and at the same time stress as he did the essential affinity of man to God, the sacredness and worth of the present life, and the nearness of the Father to man in moral

and spiritual experience. He did not deny that God was transcendent—he rather took it for granted—but he did lay all possible emphasis on the fact of God's immanence.

All this is brought to focus in what Jesus was himself, in the spirit he manifested. There is a unity between what Jesus said, did, and was. When we claim divinity for him, we not only claim honors for him but also make a mighty affirmation concerning God and a mighty affirmation concerning man. We affirm the Christlike character of God. In Jesus' life we find the ruling ideas of his preaching and the things they emphasized set forth in concrete form. The essential message of Christianity is that the Spirit of God found fullest embodiment in the personality of Jesus. Not only was there a revelation in speech—and the words of Jesus are still the most precious possession of the world's literature—there was a revelation in action: his character, his experience, and his history are the organ and vehicle of it.

Before we may consider the relevance of this revelation for men today we must recognize what it is and understand what it means. The first thing to recognize is that it is a revelation of God in human life and experience. God has been revealed to us in the soul of a man. In Jesus the divine character appears in terms of manhood. All of God that could be revealed to the understanding of men under such conditions was revealed. It was a revelation of the Father in his redemptive, manward activity; and it was adequate for his purpose, for to know him thus is the ultimate need of men, and in this knowledge is life eternal. There are heights and depths of the divine Being which cannot be revealed in human experience—which our finite reasons and imaginations can never perceive and understand. Jesus did not claim to comprehend the Infinite. His knowledge of the Father and his revelation of him were limited to God's character or, to use his own symbol, to God's perfect fatherhood.



It is here we may well ask, What is the highest characteristic of God? Is it vast physical power, mere unending duration of existence, infinite knowledge, or is it not the ethical quality of his person? It is surely a greater glory to be loving than omnipotent, greater to show pity than to remove mountains, vaster to forgive than to rule the universe. It is this spiritual and ethical aspect of God's character that is expressed to the human race by Jesus. He revealed God's essential spirit, not merely or chiefly his relation to men but the spirit that lies behind all relationships. Jesus brought man's thought of God down from the transcendental heights and the heavy clouds of the "wholly other" and revealed him to their human understanding as a God of love. He unveiled the spiritual and ethical qualities of God, and as we look into his face we forget the stifling infinitudes and the dread immensities we have associated with God, we forget the altar that in our night of ignorance we erected to the unknown God, and we see him in Jesus full of grace and truth.

This then is the second thing we need to recognize about the revelation of God in Jesus—it is a spiritual and moral revelation. It is a revelation in human experience for the spiritual and moral life of man. When, therefore, we speak of the "divinity" or the "deity" of Jesus we refer to the fullness in his life of that love, moral perfection, and redeeming power which constitute for man's moral and spiritual life the essential qualities of God. Jesus was not a theologian, or a philosopher, or a scientist. He was concerned with life in its spiritual and moral relationships—with religion, not theology; with faith, not doctrine; with spiritual realities, not metaphysical speculations. In all his references he spoke after the manner of the Hebrew prophets, and not after that of the Jewish rabbis, or the Greek philosophers, or the Christian theologians. He did not attempt to prove the existence of God, and he assumed rather than speculated regarding God's nature and attributes. When we

compare our conception of God with his, we are startled and astonished because the familiar attributes are lacking. The chief factors in our conception are power with its cosmological implications; authority with its ideas of majesty, sovereignty, and omnipotence; eternity, by which we state that God is changeless, infinite, and everlasting; and, with varying degrees of intensity, the qualities of love, forgiveness, grace, and righteousness. But in our Lord's thought of God it is on these latter qualities that the emphasis falls. These are the qualities that give meaning and value to the others. God is all those things which science and philosophy have discovered, but it is the qualities that Jesus revealed which satisfy man's deepest longings and yearnings.

The third thing to recognize is that this revelation of God in Jesus is not the only revelation of God. It was because God had already revealed himself to Israel that Jesus was able to impart his fuller knowledge. Because of the disclosure of God in Jesus we are able to recognize his revelations in the past and in the present and will be able to recognize those he will make in the future. We are provided with the key that unlocks the door to our understanding of the purposes of God for man, and we are able to enter into some appreciation of the wide range and sweep of God's activity throughout the cosmic processes. And, further, we are given a standard by which we may test the validity of any "word" claiming to have come from God.

It is necessary only to state these things for the preacher to see their relevance. If he takes the ruling idea of God's perfect fatherhood and the things it emphasizes in the preaching of Jesus as his guide, he will never stray far from the essentials of vital religion nor from the common needs of his people. No matter what aspect of God's creative or redemptive activity he may present—so far as it is open to human experience and understanding—he will present it in the light



of our Lord's revelation of the Father. A preacher's recognition of God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will determine his presentation of God the King, the Law-Giver, the Judge, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and the rest. Any idea of God which is incompatible with the character of Jesus he will dismiss as false or inadequate.

Thus, while he may not be able to give his people clear proof of the existence of God or of the objective existence of moral values, the preacher will strengthen their faith that they are not at the mercy of a heedless mechanical universe, and that the things they value most have in them an imperious degree of reality. He can reveal to them the vision of God bequeathed by Jesus and stimulate them to make it their own so that they may realize themselves as spiritual beings and enter into communion with the Father. There is not a need in the life of his people that a preacher cannot meet if he proclaims the Father as revealed in Jesus. Not only will this conception steady them in their allegiance to their ideals, maintain their faith in moral values, and strengthen them in increasing truth and goodness upon earth; but by feeding the fire of a radiant faith in their hearts it will help them to stand up courageously to the great tests of life.

### *Man as a Son of God*

Our Lord's ruling idea of man's divine sonship was determined by his conception of God's fatherhood. Despite all that saddened and discouraged him in the character and conduct of men, Jesus evidenced a determined belief in man. He believed in man's potentialities, and in so believing he was true to the consistent attitude of the best and most thoughtful writers in scripture. The author of that great primitive poem of creation portrayed man as made in the image and likeness of God—a wonderful conception for that age. The psalmists too were haunted by a sense of man's greatness, and the prophets

were insistent in their claim that man was made for righteousness. But Jesus went beyond them all in his thought of man. He believed in man's capacity to reach moral and spiritual heights which are even yet almost unimaginable to us. He saw men in terms of their possibilities and thought of them in the sense of what they might become. Not only did he teach that believers had "the right to become children of God," but he actually assumed that men were the sons of God constitutionally, and he invited them to the actualization of their spiritual birthright. Ye shall be the sons of your Father, he said, by thinking and doing and living the godlike things.

If God revealed himself to man in Jesus, he also revealed man to himself as his son in Jesus. Our Lord's filial consciousness is bound up with his revelation of God the Father. Evidence of his consciousness of a unique relation to God is found not merely in a few special passages which might conceivably have been inserted in the records—the whole gospel story bears witness to it. And his consciousness of it is determined for us not by a few debatable utterances but by his whole attitude and character. There can be no doubt that he asserted for himself what is nothing less than a position of sovereign leadership among men in the things of the spirit. If we agree with H. H. Wendt that the language of the Synoptics does not warrant our ascribing to the paternal and filial relation which Jesus regarded as existing between God and himself a character different in principle from the paternal and filial relation which, according to his teaching, exists between God and the members of his kingdom, we may still think that Jesus personally embodies it in such a way as to make it available for other men. He proclaimed in the language of his day that the "kingdom of God" had come in himself. It was manifested in all its saving power before their eyes. Indeed, if God is not the God and Father of us in some sense and in some way in which he is the God and Father of Jesus, the application



of Jesus' sonship to our estate is unintelligible. What "good news" is there in the proclamation that God has only one son? Of what value is an ideal if it is to be forever beyond the reach of man? Surely God did not send Jesus into the world to mock man's yearnings and aspirations. Was it not rather that the Father sent forth his Son so that we too may enter into our heritage of sonship? In this way Jesus' coming bears with immediate redemptive relevance upon our imperfect lives.

It will be admitted by most, if not all, scholars that the high-water mark in the Old Testament revelation of God is not "God is great" or "God is powerful" but "God is good." Robertson Smith summed this up when he said that Jehovah is the only God who ever had character in the sense of a moral will consistently directed to the realization of a moral purpose. Jesus, as we have seen, brought this conception to focus and centered men's thought on the moral character of God. He taught that the true standard, the norm, for both God and man is the same—moral perfection. Surely then it must follow that to his consciousness and in his revelation these moral and spiritual elements were fundamental, and that the direct and personal fellowship which he experienced and invited men to share was based upon them. His consciousness of his sonship was primarily and essentially moral. Absolute obedience to the will of God was its distinctive mark, and it arose out of an intimacy of knowledge and a unique sureness of God mediated by a simple but unshakable faith. The Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels, at least, gives no sign that he knows any metaphysical sonship, appeals to no pretemporal source of revelation, claims no ontological privilege separating him from humanity, but grounds his own sonship in his sure knowledge of the Father's presence in his life. Jesus thus offered to men a true way of life, a way in which they may realize their sonship, or, to change the phraseology, a way

in which they can integrate their lives, that is, fulfill their truest purpose and find their fullest development.

In harmony with his ruling idea of God's fatherhood and man's sonship, his emphasis fell not on man's sin but on his capacity for goodness. Jesus did not minimize the power of evil in men's hearts, its tragic reality or its veritable blight on human life, but on the other hand he was not morbidly pre-occupied with it. He did not exaggerate its power in the world or see it in a false abstraction and isolation from other truths and facts in human life. There is vastly less on the subject of sin in his teaching than there is in other parts of the New Testament. Though he did not say anything that might be construed as an argument not to set ourselves against it with every bit of energy and watchfulness that we possess, he did make it clear that the Father requires nothing more from even the worst sinner than repentance, faith, and love. It is remarkable that if the Father needs something "objective" before he can safely forgive, Jesus was unaware of it!

This conception of man is so relevant that one can almost think that our Lord had our modern age specifically in mind. The preacher will see in it, not only a corrective that is urgently needed in philosophical and theological thinking on this subject, but also a positive affirmation concerning man and life which common people everywhere are eager to hear. Two world wars in this century have had their reactions on humanistic thinking. With the opening of the century there was an almost universal confidence in man himself. All was well in this best of all possible worlds. The rapid advance of science and its amazing achievements contributed to this optimistic philosophy. Many thought that the religious approach to life was no longer necessary. They eliminated the supernatural and sought to humanize experience. Staking their all on man, they dismissed God from the universe. Today, fearful of the Frankenstein creations of science and seeing the tragedy of



the modern world, they have lost all confidence in man and are distrustful of human nature. Their philosophy reeks with pessimism and despair. In the theological realm a similar pessimistic strain is noticeable, especially in Barthianism. It was thrown up in Germany by the peculiar psychology that existed there between the two wars, and it was partly a reaction against the overfacile humanism and optimism we have described. Its emphasis, however, on the impotence and insignificance of man distorts its presentation of human nature. While Emil Brunner takes up a less extreme position than Karl Barth and concedes that man, in spite of his sin, retains in himself at least the ability to respond to God's call, his thought of man is dreary, gloomy, and pessimistic. This conception not only is far removed from the theocentric humanism of Jesus but also refuses to recognize the eternal outreach of man's soul toward God. Any conception of man that ignores his qualities and powers; his devotions, enthusiasms, heroisms, and aspirations; his sanctities of justice and self-sacrifice; his creative spirit, which has brought forth literature, art, science, religion; his divine soul, which rises above life and defies death, wrong, and falsehood, wills right, and is loyal to truth—any such conception must be utterly false.

There is also a humanism enjoying some popularity in America and England which seeks to combine a humanistic moral philosophy with a nontheistic and critical attitude in its interpretation of the universe. It is described as a desperate effort to establish a belief in human values on a purely naturalistic basis—an attempted divorce of "fact" from "value." Although this humanistic philosophy is essentially realistic and has none of the superficial optimism which marked the Victorian variety, it is not likely to establish itself deeply in the life of the people. As more than one have pointed out, we cannot genuinely believe in man or the excellence of man's prerogatives unless we believe in something more than man.



Nor is it possible to combine the Christian valuations with non-Christian metaphysics.

Our Lord's conception of man's worth and dignity should assist the preacher in thinking his way through these conflicting theories. He will, however, be less concerned with them than with the more popular variety of humanism or humanitarianism which he meets continually as he mingles with men and women. It has no clearly defined system of thought, but it is keenly sensitive to human suffering, need, and improvement. It may not look up reverently to God or manifest any interest in a spiritual religion, but it does look out with compassion on mankind. It believes in human decency, and it is an advocate of social security, improved conditions, fair play, honest dealings, and neighborliness. To dismiss this humanism, as some preachers do, as a vague sentimentalism is to miss a real evangelistic opportunity. Those people who are kindly, pitying, sensitive to the trials of others, and enthusiastic for human betterment are "not far from the kingdom of God." The preacher's task is, not to belittle any man's outreach toward God and others, no matter how feeble or inadequate it may be, but to direct it until it is linked up with the Eternal Purpose. Jesus did not speak slightly of human decency; he rather demanded more of it. The gospel he preached was no call to some unworldly form of devotion and virtue, but an imperative demand for men to realize their divine sonship and an assurance that in their efforts to do so they have the support of the universe.

The world needs to be challenged and inspired with this daring thought of man's dignity and worth. Preachers are needed who believe in life, in the worth of human effort and achievement, in the supremacy and validity of human reason, in the possibilities of the human intellect, in the wholesomeness and essential holiness of human love, joy, laughter, and song. Yes, preachers are needed who believe in the rightness and



worthwhileness of trying to make the world a happier and better place in which to live. In short, our age calls for preachers who find no contradiction between humanism and theism, but who see in the one the fulfillment and completion of the other.

### *The Supremacy of Love*

As we read the gospel story we are impressed by the greatness of our Lord's love—its wideness, tenderness, and strength. It was dominant in his life, and it was reflected in his preaching. It followed naturally from his conception of God's fatherhood. In his ideal of the good life he assigned to love the supreme place. Some of his most emphatic utterances are concerned with the exercise of love toward one's fellows as the supreme and normative principle governing relations with them. Admittedly the two commandments he quotes are part of the revelation to Israel and are to be found in different places in the Old Testament—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Mark 12:30-31; see Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18.) But it was the spiritual insight of Jesus that brought them together to express one all-embracing ideal of goodness. Throughout his life and in his death, love was the ruling idea. He was the great Self-giver. He lifted love up to the position of commanding importance as the sum and substance of the good life. He made it the one distinguishing mark of discipleship: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). And in this emphasis John beats in time with the Synoptic Gospels.

It will be noticed that the love of which Jesus speaks is something other than the emotional fondness which parents and children, lovers and friends feel toward one another. It

is not something related to, or the luxury of, a certain kind of temperament, nor is it the yielding in an involuntary way to an overpowering emotion. It does not depend primarily on the instinctive emotions but rather on the will which manipulates and controls them. Our Lord's words about love may be regarded as ethical imperatives, and conformity with them is regarded as a matter of duty. Jesus enjoins love for others, just as if, like any other practice inculcated by an ethical imperative, it were capable of being exercised by anyone willing to exercise it. He presupposes, however, a changed nature and disposition in man. His emphasis falls on love as the evidence of this change. A personal piety that does not bring forth this expression is worthless. The experience of God he brought to the soul of man did not spend itself in the inner life. It did not find its true expression in private emotional delights, however rapturous and however showy, but in something more valuable and practical. Man cannot deal with God in the abstract. He cannot be upright to God alone. His experience of God must find practical expression in the objective realities of human relationships. Love is no mere emotional experience; it is not merely good intentions. Love is *doing*. This is the essential emphasis. In the world a man can *do* only in relation to his fellows. He can do nothing for God that he does not first do for his neighbor.

Our Lord's teaching about love is, as every preacher knows, urgently relevant today. The evangelical preacher of yesterday urged men to get right with God, and he was right as far as he went. Getting right with God is the eternal desideratum of religion, but the preacher today has come to realize that getting right with God means, before everything else, getting right with man. The theory of evangelical Protestantism has been that if preachers could get individuals right with God, the "saved" individuals would create eventually a Christian society. Preachers emphasized the inner life as the sphere of this



regenerative process, and history bears witness that the experience did not pass over into social life but continued as an intensive spiritual self-culture. The social reforms that followed the Methodist Revival in England are quoted by some scholars as evidence that the evangelical appeal was not without its social conscience. Some affirm that the Primitive Methodist Church, the most evangelical body of Methodism, proved to be the inspiration of the early labor movement, and that the less evangelical churches provided little in the primal days of social reform. There is no need to debate this. The point is the general failure of the evangelical appeal to get right with God to pass over into social life as a permanent regenerative and redemptive force. Furthermore, preachers have discovered that the response to this kind of evangelical religion was poor in numbers and quality. The best types of manhood and womanhood would not respond to a religion that did not embrace the actual world in which they lived. They were not interested in a religion which was at bottom an emotional escape from reality. They were looking for a religion which stood for the integration of both personal and social life. The sentiment is a healthy one, and, more and more, preachers are presenting the Christian life as a life of action and service. Their emphasis falls on the ethical imperative of Jesus: "Thou shalt love." And this conception of the Christian life which stresses its activities in the objective relationships is more faithful to the authentic preaching of Jesus than that which emphasizes the emotional subjectivities of the inner life.

The preacher who places the emphasis on love is not presenting religion as a way of escape but as a way of life. Buddha pointed men to the way of escape. He said: "Cease to want, cease to desire, and you will at length cease to be—enter the great Nirvana of dreamless sleep." Jesus offered men not a way of escape but a way of conquest. He did not teach withdrawal from life but fuller entry into it. Light, salt, leaven were his

metaphors: light for banishing darkness, salt for preservation, leaven for improvement. He was a specialist in the art of victorious living. To love is to live, and the Christian life is a life of love—the life that is life indeed.

Compared with the complexity and perplexity of the legal system of his day, our Lord's demand for love was a great simplification. As we study his ruling idea against the background of legalism we can but note how simplification may be effected without any loss of depth, breadth, or force. Simplicity ought to be the aim of every preacher, for it is the essence of good preaching and the prerequisite of vital religion. Father Tyrrell once asked Baron von Hügel whether it was not a fact that all the great advances in religion had come in the form of great simplifications—a question the pulpit may well ponder! A motto on the walls of the General Motors Research Department at Dayton reads: "This problem when solved will be simple." It is a motto for preachers and theologians as well as for engineers. In 1882 Robertson Smith said: "Much unnecessary exacerbation of dogmatic controversy would be avoided if theologians were always alive to the fact that the supreme truths of religion were first promulgated and first became a living power in forms that are far simpler than the simplest system of modern dogma." Jesus never exacted the elaborate theological propositions and metaphysical mysteries which form the ingredients of the usual presentation of religion. His demands were few and simple, but they struck deep and embraced the whole of life. His preaching emphasis fell on the quality of character rather than on the correctness of belief, and this surely is where emphasis is needed today.



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# Index

- Absolutes, 98-99
- Alexander the Great, 54
- Antiochus Epiphanes, 54
- Apocalyptic literature, 42-43, 104-6, 108-11
- "Apology," 93
- Arnold, Matthew, 97
- Assurance. See Power, words of
- Authority, 13, 78, 108
- Babylonian exile, 21
- Baptism of Jesus, 12, 13, 30
- Baptist, John the, 12, 13
- Barth, Karl, 132
- Blake, William, 100
- Boreham, F. W., 69-70
- Bright, John, 118
- Brooks, Phillips, 18, 20, 46
- Brunner, Emil, 132
- Buddha, 61, 136-37
- Burney, C. F., 59
- Cadoux, C. J., 113
- Calvin, John, 64
- Carpenter, 45-46
- Charles, R. H., 43
- Compassion, 80, 116
- Conversion, 80, 97
- Crichton, Admirable, 100
- Dalman, George, 55, 56
- Definition of preaching, 17-18
- Democracy, 103
- Demosthenes, 53
- Deutero-Isaiah, 31, 43-44
- Diction, 55-57
- Dramatic elements, 75-76
- Ecce Homo, 31
- Education, 34-43
  - Jewish, 34-36
- Einstein, 64
- Eschatology, 103-11
- Ethics, 96-103
- Evangelism, 112-17, 135-36
- Figures of speech, 57-61
- Filial consciousness, 32-34, 129
- Forgiveness, 82-86
- Form criticism, 78-79
- Forsyth, P. T., 26
- Fosdick, H. E., 117
- French Revolution, 61
- Camaliel, 36
- General Motors, 137
- Germany, 132
- Gladstone, William, 77
- Golden Rule, 41
- Green, John Richard, 120
- Hellenism, 54
- Herod Antipas, 114
- Herod the Great, 54
- Hillel, 16
- Hitler, 115
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell, 46
- Hügel, Baron von, 137
- Human nature, 73-74
- Humanism, 132-37
- Imagination, 57-58, 69, 105, 117
- Independence, War of, 61
- Islam, 61
- Johnson, Samuel, 56
- Keats, 49
- King James Version, 15
- Languages, knowledge of, 37-39, 55-56
- Laval, 115



- Leckie, J. H., 107  
 Lister, Lord, 64  
 Livingstone, David, 64  
 Lord's Prayer, 86  
 Love, 134-37
- Maccabaeus, Judas, 54  
 Maclaren, Alexander, 61  
 Manson, T. W., 56, 68, 77  
 Manson, William, 78  
 Marconi, 64  
 Marx, Karl, 64  
 Methodism  
   early, 62  
   Primitive, 136  
 Methodist Revival, 136  
 Midrash, 35  
 Mishnah, 35, 36  
 Mohammed, 61  
 Mohammedanism, 25  
 Moore, G. F., 38  
 Morley, John, 96  
 Mosgiel, N. Z., 69
- Nationalism, 115  
 Natural phenomena, 70-72  
 New Zealand, 69, 117  
 Newton, 64  
 Nirvana, 137
- Old Testament, 40-43, 66, 72, 81, 88
- Parable, meaning of, 67-69  
 Pascal, 91  
 Pax Romana, 16  
 Personality in preaching, 18, 20  
 Physical appearance, 46-48  
 Physical preparation, 43-45  
 Plato, 93, 100  
 Poetic forms, 59-61  
 Power, words of, 61-63  
 Practical knowledge, 38-40  
 Preacher, marks of, 46-47  
 Prophet-Teacher, 12-17
- Quietism, 32  
 Quislings, 115
- "Rabbi," 15  
 Rabbinic methods, 37-38  
 "Rabboni," 16  
 Reader's Digest, 117  
 Repentance, 82  
 Roman Catholic art, 44
- Sacramental preaching, 25-28  
 Sacrifice, 22-25  
 "Safety first," 92  
 Schopenhauer, 97  
 Schweitzer, 103-4  
 Seneca, 100  
 Sermon on the Mount, 42, 89  
 Servant of Yahweh, 43, 64  
 Shaw, G. B., 56  
 Shema, 25, 98  
 Simpson, 64  
 Sin, 82-84, 131  
 Smith, Robertson, 130, 137  
 Social implications, 102  
 Socrates, 61, 93, 100  
 Son of man-Messiah, 104-5  
 Sources of illustrations, 69-76  
 Spiritual preparation, 31-34  
 Synagogue, 21-28
- Tabitha, Aunt, 100  
 Targum, 35  
 Temple. See Synagogue  
 Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, 42  
 Titus, 25  
 Truth in preaching, 18-20  
 Types of preaching  
   apologetic, 93-96  
   doctrinal, 87-90  
   eschatological, 103-11  
   ethical, 96-103  
   evangelical, 80-86

expository, 78-80  
polemic, 90-93  
Tyrrell, Father, 137

Visual aids in preaching, 76  
Voice of Jesus, 48-53

Watkinson, W. L., 119  
Weiss, 103  
Wendt, H. H., 129  
Wesley, John, 61, 120  
Whately, Archbishop, 96  
Whyte, Alexander, 31  
Witness, 18, 106



